

A BROKEN LILY



BY

MRS MORTIMER COLLINS



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VOL. I.

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BY

MRS. MORTIMER COLLINS

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

AN UNKNOWN FRIEND

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

IN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE.

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A BROKEN LILY.

CHAPTER I.

“AND what’s to be the arrangement to-morrow, Bart? Do you dine with me or I with you?”

“Well, I think on so grand an occasion as your thirtieth birthday we ought to dine at the Hall, for the resources of my little place are not equal to the event. What do you say, Thorn?”

“Oh, I don’t see that! It seems to me that red-letter days should be kept at the Vicarage, because it’s so much

snugger. I hate fuss and ceremony of all kinds."

"But there must be ceremony in life, or we should all go wrong. My conscience often smites me, Thorn, that we take life too easily. I feel that I am a very unworthy parson, and——"

"That I am an unworthy squire, eh, Bart?"

"I didn't mean that, exactly, but——"

"But something very like it!"

"What I feel is that life comes too easily to us."

"And a very pleasant feeling too."

"No, not altogether, because it is a guilty one. I ought to work more amongst my people, and I ought to find out what it is to live just on my income, and not always be living on you; and——" hesitating.

"Yes? and what else?"

"I ought to give up more time

to study, instead of enjoying your friendship and your society—and I *do* enjoy them, Thorn, and feel somehow that I have no right to ; don't you understand ?”

“No, I don't understand. Arguing on the same lines, I suppose I ought as ‘Squire’ of the place to devote my time to the people and give up your friendship. But suppose we both married, Bart, we should have to give up some of our time to our wives and children, shouldn't we ? And if we have agreed that friendship is better than love, and that we mean to remain bachelors, surely we can spare a little time for indulging in friendship. You've got one of your duty fits on, old boy !”

“I am afraid I ought to have them oftener.”

“Nonsense, Bart, nonsense. You're

one of those good fellows, by nature broad and healthful ; who by circumstances are rendered narrow and morbid. You are always reminding me that you are indebted to my father for your education. I don't see the indebtedness myself, unless it is on my father's side. It was his duty to provide for his wife's sister's child, and he should have thanked God, and no doubt did, for being allowed the means of doing it. It's the giver who should be grateful, not the receiver ; for there is nothing that gratifies the heart so much as giving."

"That's your philosophy, Thorn ; but it isn't everyone's."

"At any rate it was what your Master taught, so you can accept it."

"Don't say *my* Master, Thorn ; you know you are really a Christian yourself, though you are careless of the forms

of religion. I am sure no man was ever more a Christian at heart."

"Well, as to that it isn't of much consequence. You know what the great Lord Shaftesbury, he of the '*Characteristics*,' said, there is one religion which all wise men follow, and no wise man mentions.* And wasn't it Gibbon who said, 'To the poet all religions are equally true, to the philosopher all are equally false, and to the statesman all are equally useful. I am the philosopher, don't you see?'" laughing heartily.

"Thorn! I don't like to hear you jest on religion."

"Jest! my dear boy, I'm quite serious."

"You can't guide your life by philosophy only; you must be bound by certain laws, just as the universe is, just as every household is."

* This was written before "Endymion" was published.

"But who said that philosophy recognised no laws? It recognises the minutest law of nature."

"Yes, I know all that, but you don't see what I mean. I'm not clever enough to argue with you, but I want you to see that——"

"Yes, Bart, I know what you mean. You want me to realise that human nature, being prone to evil as you would say in the pulpit, certain laws must be made and embodied and called religion; and those laws must be such as to prevent wickedness and crime as far as possible; therefore, good people must obey laws made to keep the bad in order."

"Of course they must for their own protection. You know, Thorn, I always feel that you despise such laws. You neglect ceremony, and sometimes you feel the consequences, as witness in your own household."

“Yes, I can’t say that things are very comfortable up at the Hall with all those idle servants; and I’m a good deal puzzled what to do. I can’t stand my aunt coming back again and everlastingly lecturing me, and I don’t suppose she can stand me. And of course she could not live without spiritual sustenance, which, if you remember, she decided you were not competent to give. I suppose I ought to follow her advice and marry.”

“I suppose you ought,” dolefully.

“And so ought you for that matter.”

“I don’t see how a wife and family are to be kept on my stipend. Marriage is out of the question with me.”

“Unless you get a better living.”

“And leave Overton?”

“Of necessity.”

“That would be a wrench, Thorn. Notwithstanding my narrow ideas of

duty as you call them, I couldn't manage that yet. It would want preparation."

"Don't fret over the prospect, old boy. We've had five very happy years, in fact eight, counting our college time, and we're not going to be separated yet. We won't let duty interfere so far as that just yet, either in the shape of a woman or anything else, eh, Laddie?" patting the head of a handsome collie that was stretched on the hearthrug.

"I often wonder that a woman has not come in between us, Thorn."

"Yes, so do I, considering what a good-looking fellow you are!"

"I meant considering how handsome *you* are, and your enviable position. I believe those Miss Bonsors hate me, because they think I stand in the way of their chances with you."

"And I believe Miss Green hates *me*; for notwithstanding her mature years,

Bart, she looks sweetly on you. How would you like to have her seated in this chair instead of me, old boy?"

"Ugh! Don't mention her. I'm absolutely frightened of that woman. I realise what a weak-minded fool I am when I am in her presence. In fact she is quite master in parish matters, for rather than have any altercation with her, I give in to everything she proposes."

"And she'll propose marriage some day, and you won't be able to help yourself."

"Then I shall run to old Keziah or to you for protection. No, Thorn, I think I can be trusted to take care of myself in that way. When one reaches our age safely, one is generally sure of one's self. I don't suppose either of us would now do anything rash in the way of marriage."

"No, I got over the fever of love years

ago, long before I met you, Bart. I remember when I thought I should die because a girl jilted me; but I lived to fall in love again two or three times. When I look back it all seems vulgar and silly, not worthy the name of love, except in one case."

"What was that?"

"It was another man's wife. Don't look horrified. I never spoke to her. It was the wife of a young artist who came down here for a bit of scenery. They were a mere boy and girl, only married a few months. They lodged at old Watkins's, and whenever the young fellow went out to do a bit of painting, his wife was always with him. She was such a glorious creature, Bart, just the woman I could have loved. How I envied that boy! I used positively to lounge about the farm-house, to get a sight of her, and to watch which way they were going. He

painted the church here from the west side. I shall always remember the spot where he sat with that beautiful girl by his side. She looked so pure, so healthy, so good; she seemed to sympathize so thoroughly with all her husband said and did; she was so full of life and strength, and seemed never to tire in her walks, for I was always managing to meet them; she used to laugh in a girlish way as she passed me, as if she were having a little fun at my expense; and joined to her girlishness was a pretty dignity, for it was evident from her figure that she was about to become—but there, it's eleven years ago, and I'm talking romantic nonsense. I've never fallen in love again, and don't suppose I ever shall unless I see anyone as lovely as my ideal."

"What became of her?"

"You know the little marble cross with the broken lily by the west corner——"

"You don't mean to say she died?"

"Yes, she gave birth to a child prematurely, and died a few hours after. The poor fellow, old Watkins told me, was heartbroken. She was buried in the west corner, because she had admired that part of the churchyard when her husband sketched the church."

"What became of the poor artist?"

"He used to come down every now and then for the first two or three years to visit her grave; but it's many years now since he has been heard of. Perhaps he's married again and forgotten her. I often wonder as I pass the little cross, whether he's alive still or what's become of him."

"The grave seems always to be nicely kept."

"That's my doing. I placed the marble cross there. The artist was evidently not rich, and I discovered that he

had given an order for a stone cross with the inscription you see there; so I paid off the mason and added a bribe for secrecy, and got that bit of marble done by Cox; and I have it kept in order. There's my little romance, Bart; and now I think I'll blow it out of my head with a cigar as I walk home; and I'll just take a little brandy to keep out the chill, for these May nights are treacherous. I'll look after the commissariat to-morrow, old boy, so don't you trouble. We must have something special, eh? I'll drive in for it."

"Don't tax old Keziah's powers too much, Thorn."

"Oh, she's equal to anything! Good-night! Come, Laddie."

CHAPTER II.

THORNTON MEADOWS was generally known in the village of Overton as "the Squire," or amongst the older folk who remembered his father, he was still "the young Squire." His squirearchy was not very great. He reigned over some five hundred acres; acres that had been profitable enough in times gone by, but the three farmers, whose fathers and grandfathers before them had brought up their families on the land and paid a tidy rent, now began to realise that the days of small farming were over.

“You should take the land into your own hands, have a good steward and use machinery,” Sir Herbert West had said to his neighbour Squire Meadows, but the Squire had answered that there was enough funded property for a quiet fellow to live upon without being bothered with the land.

This was true enough. The Meadows family were descended from a Sir Robert Meadows, a famous scrivener in the time of Charles the Second, who lent the King money, and was rewarded with knighthood and a grant of arms. Overton Hall had been built by a grandson of Sir Robert, in the reign of George the First, a period when what is known as the Queen Anne style had scarcely given place to that worst of all styles, or no-style-at-all, the Georgian. Attempts had been made from time to time by the various occupiers to add to, or

beautify the house ; so that the square red brick building had broken out into wings and gables and ornamental stone-work till it was rather a hybrid affair. It certainly could not be called either a pretty or a handsome place ; but to a stranger first seeing it, it might seem picturesque, partly from age, and partly from its mixture of styles. Thornton Meadows, however, was too well acquainted with it to find the picturesque in it. To him it was a very ugly and a very dull house. He might have forgotten the ugliness of the outside had there been any comfort inside ; but the furniture and decorations were of the florid gilt-gingerbread magnificence that was in fashion at about the time of his birth. His father had married somewhat late in life, and having during his bachelor days accumulated his property, he found himself in

a position to thoroughly redecorate the Hall and refurnish it before bringing his bride home. For this purpose he employed the best of decorators and upholsterers; but as this was at a time when art was wholly unconnected with trade, the result was that there was a great deal of money's worth and very little taste. The crimson and gold had now become dingy, and the scrolly patterns of the furniture and the sprawly patterns of the carpets were to Thornton Meadows simply hideous.

But however much the Squire may have disliked the ancestral home, he thoroughly appreciated his position in life, as a man with nothing to do. He was the second son of George Meadows, and from his earliest remembrance it had always been impressed on him by his father and aunt, that he must choose some profession. The

process of "bending the twig" to "incline the tree" had not been at all successful, in fact the twig declined to bend.

Young Thornton at one moment declared he would be a soldier; at another he would rail against war as unnecessary and barbaric. Then he would be a lawyer, but on reflection he considered that no conscientious lawyer could possibly argue, for mere gain, the case of a person whom he believed to be in the wrong. Then he would be a parson, but in a philosophic fit, after a tedious sermon in church, he declared that the age of parsons had gone by, that sermons were only necessary in the days when priests had all the learning, and that people could now read and study for themselves, and did not require a half-educated man to guide them.

These very unorthodox opinions were

expressed before his Aunt, Miss Arabella Meadows, who at that time reigned at the Hall, and who relied implicitly for spiritual guidance on the teachings of the reverend gentleman who was alluded to as the half-educated man.

Mrs. Meadows, for whom so much magnificence had been prepared at the Hall, did not live long to enjoy it. After bearing two sons and two daughters she died, and her husband's maiden sister undertook the care of the household and children.

The old Squire was perhaps the very model of conventionality; and the "loose opinions," as he termed them, of his son Thornton, were a great grief. His eldest son Robert was a boy after his own heart. It is true he had never done anything remarkable either at school or college: but he was steady-going and quiet, with a due sense of his

responsibility as an eldest son. This was the traditionary character of the Meadows family. The Squires had always been good, substantial, steady men, who had kept up the place with pride, and not broken the nest egg, which the famous scrivener had provided.

There were richer neighbours, lords of the soil in Oakshire, who might have looked down on the Meadows'; but they always held their position because they had a reputation for possessing funded property to a large extent—much larger than was warranted by actual facts.

Good, loyal men and gentlemen had they all been from the time of the scrivener downwards, save and except one, a Robert Meadows, in the time of George the Third, who had, as his descendants would tell you with bated breath and solemn look, been a partisan

of "Jack Wilkes and Liberty." But it had pleased a benign Providence, so Thornton's father had always said, to check him in his headlong career, by an early death. Three years had he reigned at the Hall, in name at least, for he was never there in person. His portrait was put out of sight in a disused room, until Thornton Meadows became the Squire of Overton. Thornton's father, when he had been annoyed with his son, often muttered something about "that radical Robert," and Thornton, who had always found a peculiar fascination in the portrait of his radical ancestor, was wont to take the comparison as a compliment. On the other hand, when Miss Arabella would inveigh against the evils of Democracy, Thornton would say in a sort of oratorical tone "Democracy is the worst form of tyranny," a sentiment which his father

loudly applauded. It was very evident that the old Squire and his sister had more than they could manage in this strange boy.

"That boy fairly puzzles me," said the Squire to his sister one day. "He's not like any of us, and if his mother hadn't been the best of women, I should have thought she played me false."

"It's that 'radical Robert's blood coming out,'" said the lady.

"Stuff and nonsense, Arabella, as if after a hundred years anything of that sort could happen. Besides the boy's so deuced proud in some things, you can't call him a radical exactly. I told him the other day that he might as well be civil to Ashley's daughter, for there's money there, and I can see the girl likes him, but no: he must needs turn round and tell me he's not going to toady to a millionaire. I can't see what's

to become of him. I'm not going to impoverish the house to keep him in idleness; he'll not have a penny from me besides his three hundred a year."

But the old Squire's difficulties, at least so far as provision for Thornton was concerned, were soon to be settled for him. His much loved eldest son died in the twenty-fifth year of his age at Rome. He was making the "grand tour" in company with a college mate, the Honourable Edward Buller; for although "the grand tour" had become a thing which any Cook's tourist or ordinary well-to-do tradesman could accomplish, still it was a tradition in the Meadows family, and must be undertaken by the eldest son. While at Rome the young man was seized with fever, and before his father could reach him he died.

This was a very great loss to the Squire, and it is to be feared that he

did not see in it the benignity which he had ascribed to the early death of the "radical Robert." Not only had he loved his first born with a greater love than he had given to his other children, but he felt that his second and only surviving son was very unfit to succeed him in the squirearchy.

It is probable that grief for his elder, and anxiety about his younger son, shortened his life by some years, for the old Squire died about a couple of years after his son, while Thornton was still at college.

One daughter was already married; the other, by the wish of her brother, remained with her aunt at the Hall. Everything went on the same as in the old Squire's lifetime; in fact, Thornton interfered so little that Miss Arabella considered it her duty to deliver him sundry lectures on the duties of his

position. Not that the lady objected to exercising the authority that was vested in her, but she felt that the traditions of the house must be kept up.

But the young Squire politely informed his aunt that he would trust everything to her, and he only wanted to be left alone; at which Miss Arabella looked solemnly shocked.

Miss Arabella Meadows was one of those thoroughly good, self-sacrificing, kind-hearted maiden ladies (and there are plenty of matrons of like character), who have only one fault—namely, narrow-mindedness. And of what use is the very biggest heart if it be governed by a narrow mind? These good, narrow-minded people are sometimes very useful in their way, only it must be *their* way, and not yours. They are ready to sacrifice themselves so long as the altar at which they must be offered up is of

their own pattern; but when it comes to a strange altar they straightway shut themselves up in a sort of self-justification. So this one fault enlarges itself into a monstrous blot, and breeds intolerance, obstinacy, doggedness, conceit, and other evils.

Miss Arabella had certainly no desire to remain at the Hall, for she had during the many years she had lived with her brother accumulated a very comfortable sum of money, and had often calculated on the manner in which she would like to spend it. She had always considered it her duty to remain with her brother till her nieces were old enough to take the cares of the household, and when the Squire died, she felt that her younger niece still required her presence. That young lady however very soon became engaged to be married, and Miss Arabella began to take thought with herself, as

to whether it would be right on her part to leave her nephew all to himself to follow his own "irregular ways," as she called them, or whether she ought not to remain as mistress of the household, and keep up as far as possible the traditions of the family, which young Thornton seemed inclined to set at naught.

If Thornton's ways had been her ways, there would probably have been no doubt in her mind; she would have rigidly sacrificed herself and remained mistress at the Hall until a new mistress arrived. But, as she expressed it, she had no patience with such odd goings-on, and she wasn't going to shut herself up in that dull place to please Thornton, when she might be enjoying herself elsewhere. She arrived at this conclusion the more readily because her favourite pastor had left Overton for richer

pastures, and was succeeded by the Reverend Bartholomew Broderick, a college mate and cousin of Thornton's. That this young gentleman was a friend of Thornton's, and "one of that poor Broderick family," was quite enough for Miss Arabella; her narrow mind was at once shut against him, and she took no pains to cultivate his acquaintance. As he is, however, by no means an uninteresting character to a more tolerant observer, we will devote a fresh chapter to him.

CHAPTER III.

THE REVEREND BARTHOLOMEW BRODERICK was nephew to Mrs. Meadows, her sister having married the Reverend Charles Broderick. Mrs. Meadows always spoke of this lady as "my poor sister," the pity being called forth by the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Broderick had an income which might have served very comfortably for themselves and two or three children, but did not meet by any means the necessities of the eleven children which they had brought into the world. Various were the shifts to which this worthy couple

were put to make both ends meet, as the saying is ; and to give the children education. Bartholomew, or Bart, as he was always called, was the fifth child, but second son ; and as he was about the same age as Thornton, the old Squire offered to send him to college with his son, and pay all his expenses, even to a suitable supply of pocket-money. The two cousins had met but once in their life-time, when they were lads ; for the Brodericks lived in Lincolnshire, and there was little communication between the families after Mrs. Meadows' death. The old Squire had often suggested to his sister that a detachment of four or five out of the eleven might with profit to themselves and their parents spend a month at the Hall at Christmas or Midsummer, but Miss Arabella had no notion of poor relations taking away any portion of the worldly goods of

her own nephews and nieces, and she quite discouraged any intimacy between the families. In fact so plainly had this lady shown her disinclination to have anything to do with the Brodericks, that the Squire's annual Christmas gift of fifty pounds was sent surreptitiously; while a large box of cast-off clothes and cheap presents was sent ostentatiously by Miss Arabella, with a patronising letter containing a lecture on thrift. Miss Arabella's opinion—and is it not a most prudent one?—was that when people are poor they must take the consequences, and learn to bear poverty in a humble spirit; and that much help only pampers them, and renders them unfit for their station in life. The “annual box of old clo.,” as an irreverent young Broderick termed it, was always packed with especial regard to the condition of the receivers of it. A poor parson with eleven children could

not afford to allow his wife or daughters to go out to parties, Miss Arabella argued, so no evening dresses were sent, and if any morning dress were gay in trimmings (and Miss Arabella herself dearly loved a bit of finery) it was at once divested of everything superfluous.

This poverty and dependence on others, and the general struggling and scraping and saving and self-sacrificing that accompany poverty, had probably had some effect in forming Bart Broderick's character. "Sweet are the uses of adversity" we are told; but the maker of this proverb was most likely a good man who judged from his own standpoint. Adversity, when it comes in the shape of poverty, does not always make people better. If a man is bad at heart—and one is forced by what one sees to believe that badness of heart exists, though it is a terrible belief—adversity makes him worse. But if there

is goodness of heart—just ever so little, as one tries to hope there is in all men—then adversity, whether it come as grief or poverty, or in what shape soever, will bring it to the front.

But whether adversity had formed Bart's character or not, he was a very good man. At least so thought Thornton Meadows, his most intimate friend. When the cousins met at College they found a particular fascination in each other. Entirely opposite in character, they were alike in tastes. Before they had spent a month together they had become as inseparable as the firmest friends; and they were always regretting that they had passed so many years without knowing one another. It was whispered by many that Thornton, with his broad and heterodox opinions would corrupt his cousin; but the whisperers were mistaken, for Bart had perhaps

more influence over Thornton than Thornton over Bart. The young parson never made any serious attempt to "convert" his cousin; he saw that his opinions were, as Thornton said, part of himself, that he could not help having them any more than he could help having curly brown hair or those piercing steel grey eyes which seemed to see through everyone and everything.

"You, my dear boy, were *taught* your Christianity," Thornton would say; "you learnt it from books and the teaching of men who had themselves been taught, and it really suits you very well; but my belief and opinions came to me as I grew, and I could no more change them than I could change my whole physical appearance."

But Bart thought it his duty every now and then to make a mild protest against his cousin's way of looking at

things, though it generally ended in his being worsted in argument. He was not a clever man : he was led by the heart rather than the head ; but the promptings of a good heart will not take one very far out of the right way, and will cause but little harm in the world, unless it be to the possessor of the heart, who may have to suffer for his own goodness.

When Thornton Meadows found himself the master of Overton Hall, and found also that the time was approaching when he and his cousin must leave Oxford and separate, he set himself to consider whether it were possible to do anything to avert the separation. He would have liked to offer Bart free quarters at the Hall as long as he chose to stay, but he knew the conscientious fellow would never hear of this ; besides, there were his sister and aunt to consult

on the subject, and Miss Arabella was "dead against" the Brodericks, and knew how to make the house uncomfortable for those she did not like.

After cogitating on the matter some weeks, and engaging in some mysterious business which he did not communicate to his relations, for fear of his aunt's ire and his cousin's conscientious scruples, he suddenly informed Bart that the living of Overton was likely to be vacant very soon.

"It's a beggarly living, Bart," he said, "but I'm selfish enough to want you to take it to keep you near me. The appointment lies in the hands of two other fellows besides myself, and we generally take it in turns. The present man was put in by my father to please my aunt, and it's Sir Herbert West's turn now, but I've made it all right with him, and he's left it to me. Will you take it?"

“Take it! I should think so, and consider myself a lucky fellow.”

“You can’t live on it, you know, but I’ll take care you don’t starve.”

“No, Thorn, you must let me shift for myself. I’ve been used to poverty, you know, and cannot always expect to live as I have done these three years with your father’s liberal allowance.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, Bart. Make yourself happy while you can. Don’t pose as an ill-fed martyr until you’re obliged. Ill-fed people are always morbid. Your first duty to your country is to make a healthy animal of yourself. When you’ve done that you may cultivate your mental and moral qualities as much as you like.”

“Then, Thorn, do you not believe in the goodness of ascetics?”

“No, I don’t. Asceticism may keep down the passions, though even that I

am inclined to doubt; but not having tried it I can give no positive opinion. But it will certainly develop an unhealthy condition of body, and make a man take a morbid and narrow view of existence."

"I must say I enjoy the good things of this life; but I have an unpleasant sense of guilt mixed with the enjoyment."

"Why should you? You are moderate enough in all things. I hate a glutton even worse than a drunkard, but I have no patience with a fellow who starves himself on principle. All extremes are bad. I shall feel it my duty to look after you at Overton, because you are accepting the living to please me, when you might do so much better."

And so it came to pass that Miss Arabella's favourite Evangelical pastor had a better living offered him, and the

Reverend Bartholomew Broderick became the Vicar of Overton.

The church was small, built in the form of a cross, and was like a miniature cathedral. Here for the last hundred and fifty years had the Meadows' family worshipped, and in vaults around the church they were buried. Here Thornton when he was a boy, and probably many a youthful member of the family before him, had read over and over again during sermon time the epitaphs on the walls, which set forth in glowing terms the virtues of his ancestors. He used to try and picture these good people in real life, and wondered how anyone so preternaturally good managed to get through life at all. He would think of his family as it was then, with its bickerings and quarrels and Aunt Arabella's way of making every one unhappy, and her little meannesses and pettinesses ; and he came

to the conclusion that none of them would be able to have all these beautiful things recorded on their tablets when they died.

Still it seemed to him that there was a coldness attached to all this marble virtue; and somehow he connected it with the mouldy smell of the church and the dampness coming up in between the tombstones which formed the floor, and the general ugliness and dulness of Overton Hall, and altogether formed a very lugubrious idea of his ancestors. "Robert the Radical" had evidently been considered unworthy of an epitaph, for simply his name with dates of his birth and death had been inscribed on a small tablet.

"When I die, I should like to have a little tablet like 'Radical Robert,' and not a lot of rubbish about a virtuous life," Thornton had remarked one Sunday when he had grown old enough to dis-

believe in the great virtues of his ancestors. For this remark he was informed by his Aunt Arabella that he was a wicked boy, and that no one was likely to take the trouble to write his epitaph.

Of Overton Church, with its many mementos of the Meadows' family, and mementos also of a much older family, of whom not a single tradition even lingered in the village, Bart Broderick became the minister. The Vicarage was a part of the old priory, and was picturesque outside, but rather inconvenient for dwelling purposes. It was necessary for a moderately tall man, as Bart was, to stoop in passing through doorways; and there were steps up into rooms and steps down into rooms, and steps lurking in all sorts of odd corners, so that one lived in a perpetual fear of breaking one's neck. But once snugly ensconced in the long, low-ceilinged, high

wainscotted parlour, with its embayed windows overlooking the church and grounds of Overton Hall, and furnished with Thorton Meadows' money and taste, there was nothing more to be desired.

The village of Overton was a quarter of a mile from the church, and consisted of a few houses grouped together on either side of the road, with a line of cottages branching off where the agricultural labourers lived, or rather existed, with their wives and families on a few shillings a week. The blacksmith was the oracle of the village amongst the men, and the general-shop woman held sway amongst the women.

Miss Arabella's Evangelical pastor, a man who knew how to be all things to all men, had found out that by conciliating these two, he could pretty well govern the village; but Bart Broderick, who went straight at everything and was no

respector of persons, sometimes fell foul of these village worthies.

There was in the midst of the village a small barn-like building called Little Salem Chapel, built at the time of one of those spasmodic religious agitations in the country, called "revivals." At one time this chapel, or "opposition shop," as Farmer Watkins called it, proved a formidable rival to the church. A poorly fed people, as are the agricultural folk of Oakshire, will be easily led by anything new, and there is a sort of "we-are-all-one-as-good-as-the-other feeling," and a general defiance of any authority, amongst the lower forms of dissent, which are attractive to the poor man. But when a hard winter comes, and there is a cry for food and coals and clothing, the parson of the parish is the man to turn to, not the poor little chapel minister who is paid a miserable pittance, and bullied by all his flock.

So Little Salem had never flourished very much after the first two or three years. The district was found to be too poor and small to keep a resident minister, and after a time even a visiting minister, who came every alternate Sunday, was withdrawn, and the few remaining chapelites had to depend on the very infrequent visits of an itinerant preacher, a cadaverous-looking man, who on week-days carried on the trade of a cobbler in a village six miles from Overton.

At the time our story opens, Bart Broderick had been Vicar of Overton for nearly five years. The villagers, who must have something to talk about, were at this time most concerned with the details of the war that was raging between France and Germany. The "oracle" used to get a copy of *Lloyd's Newspaper* when it was about three days old, and hold forth at the forge or the inn.

Although Overton was not forty miles from London, there was very little of what is termed civilization to be found about. There were old men and women who had never travelled by rail and never been to London. They could see the trains in the distance flying through the green fields, but the nearest station was six miles away. They had not as yet heard anything about strikes and trades unions. On the wooden barn at Farmer Watkins's some youthful agitator scribbled a few ill-spelt references to Joseph Arch and strikes, but as the employers were the only ones who could read them, they had little effect.

Some of the old people remembered the times when "old Boney," as they used to call him, was a terror to our country. To them a foreigner meant either a Frenchman or negro, and they found it difficult to understand that war was going on

with the French without the English being concerned. Bart Broderick had been considerably bothered with questions as to whether England were safe, and whether he thought the French would land.

The only other subject of interest which was at this time discussed in the village, was concerning the household at Overton Hall. The young Squire it was generally agreed was "letting things go to rack and ruin." The old housekeeper, who had served Miss Arabella for twenty years, had quite declined to remain. The new one seemed unable to manage the servants, who did very much as they liked. The Squire spent the best part of his time at the Vicarage, and his servants, having so much time on their hands, got into mischief and caused grave scandals. It is noticeable that servants who have little to do become discontented, and find out

that they have all sorts of grievances. So there were continual changes made in the servants' hall at Overton, and the old faces which had appeared Sunday after Sunday in the two pews devoted to the Squire's household, and which seemed as much a part of the establishment as the Squire himself, gradually disappeared, save and except the coachman's. The coachman was a fine, well-built, comfortable-looking man of fifty, who knew how to appreciate good fortune without quarrelling with it. Boy and man he had been in the service forty years, and had perseveringly worked his way up step by step, and now he was not going to quarrel with his master because the carriage was never wanted, and the horses "were eating their heads off in the stable." Besides, as he confided to his buxom wife, who lived at the lodge, "Young master is a deal too easy-going and good-natured, and he

wants some one to stand by him and not see him cheated; and stand by him I will, whatever happens." Such was the general state of affairs in Overton Hall and Overton village when Thornton Meadows reached his thirtieth birthday.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the two friends parted for the night, after the conversation recorded in the first chapter of this book, Bart Broderick called his housekeeper Keziah, to consult with her about the next day's dinner.

Keziah was a widow, who had been for many years the cook and housekeeper and general factotum at the Vicarage, and caretaker of the church. Mr. Broderick had taken her with the vicarage, as she seemed, in fact, to be a part of it. Without being hypocritical she was fond of a little display of religion and of quoting

scriptural texts. It was probably mere habit with her, a habit commenced as an appropriate appendage to her office of caretaker, and confirmed by time. But it was a habit which would lead one to suppose that her late master would be more acceptable to her than her present one. He was a suave man, with an oily countenance, a slow, oily manner of speaking, and a reference to religion ever in his mouth. But with all his suavity and oiliness and slowness there seemed to be a power lurking behind—a sort of determination to be even with everyone.

Bart Broderick on the other hand carried his heart in his face, was genial and cheerful, seldom mentioned religious matters out of church, and was perhaps altogether more like a layman than a clergyman.

The truest estimate of a man is perhaps that which is made of him in his own household. If Keziah was ever questioned

of her late master she simply shook her head; but it might be said with regard to her present master that she literally worshipped the ground he trod on, notwithstanding the second commandment, which she rubbed up with a duster every Saturday afternoon in preparation for Sunday, unconscious of the fact that she broke it as much as any idolatrous Israelite ever did.

There was one thing for which Keziah was noted far and wide—the bringing up of servant girls. Homely mothers who were not afraid of a little severity for their daughters used to bespeak Keziah's interest for them long before the time for going out to service arrived. Farmers' wives who wanted general servants, and housekeepers at the "big houses" who wanted kitchen-maids, used always to look out for "Keziah's girls." Not that old Keziah ever gave any one of them a

good character. But that was an understood thing, and was not expected. Her custom was to have a young girl with her at the vicarage who was engaged to do whatever she was bid. The poor girl had generally a very bad time of it, except in the matter of eating and drinking.

"They can't work unless they eats," Keziah was wont to observe; and she would hear of no delicate appetites, or likes and dislikes, or whims and fancies. They had to eat—and work also. She badgered and bullied and scolded and worried them into learning their work, and they learnt it thoroughly. When Mr. Broderick came to the vicarage, the Squire suggested a somewhat different arrangement from the old order of things, and proposed that Keziah should be cook and housekeeper, and a regular housemaid should be employed to wait at table. But Keziah wouldn't hear of this. She said

she'd always been considered good enough to wait on the master, and she "didn't want any of them flighty, dressed-up hussies a-interfering with her." So she was humoured, and remained supreme at the vicarage, bullying and badgering and scolding and worrying as usual.

"Keziah!" said her master, when she answered his summons after Thornton Meadows had left; "the Squire will dine here again to-morrow, and as it's his birthday I want you to manage a little something extra, you know—something in your best style."

"Cert'nly, Sir. I'll do my best, Sir. But lord-a-mercy to think of the Squire a-comin' here for his birthday dinner, when he've got all them servants a-eatin' their heads off at the 'All, which it does seem a pity; and such goings-on as there is with them gals there, as they don't mind Mrs. Mitchell no more nor a broom-

stick, which, as it says in the 'Pistle to the Romans——"

"Yes, yes, Keziah! it is a pity. But the Squire says he is more comfortable here, and enjoys your cooking——"

"Bless 'is 'art; he always were so kind to me. I mind the time when he used to come to see my son Jack, who was always a sickly one, poor lad; and Master Thornton, he were only about eight year old, and he'd ask questions as I never heard no child ask afore in my life; and he used to make that free and easy with us that the Squire he put a stop to his comin', and quite right too, for as the 'oly catechism says we should be'ave lowly and rev'rently to all our betters."

"Yes, Keziah; he's always kind, and we must make things as comfortable as we can for him."

"Yes, we will, Sir. But there, I should like to see the old 'All alive again, with

a birthday party as there was in old Squire's time, and the young Squire a-'olding up 'is 'ead like, and a-riding about in his carriage, and not a-letting that Farmer Kemington get atop of him. Why, they calls un *Muster* Kemington now, and I minds the time when he were a lad at the plough, and his father on the parish, and it's all along o' they steam ingins he's done it, which they call the fellows as works them 'Kemington's devils,' and no wonder, and he keepin' his saddle 'orses and a-following of the 'ounds, and a-ridin' about in that 'igh cart as fast as fast, an' a-passed Sir Herbert's carriage with Sir Herbert and his lady in it, as I saw with my own eyes, a-tearin' along, which he'll break his neck some day, and no loss neither, a-settin' un-self up as good as Squire."

"That's not at all a Christian sentiment, Keziah."

“ But you wouldn't go for to call Farmer Kemington a Christian, Sir, would you? though he does go to church reg'lar, a-batin' down every soul as he employs to the last farthing. Now Squire don't go to church, dear soul, which I wish he did; but I don't believe the Lord will send him to hell-fire as you reads in that 'I believe' on saints-days an' 'olydays, which Miss Green puts the red marker in. There never was a better man, save yourself, Sir, than young Squire; an' if he'd only go to church an' ride in's carriage, and go to court-house with the magistrits, and set the 'All a-going, he'd be as true a Christian as ever there was, Sir. As the blessed Saint Paul says in his 'Pistle——”

“ Yes, yes, Keziah. Perhaps he'll turn over a new leaf now; thirty's a responsible age—very responsible—and——” He was thinking of himself and how little he had

done, and his own thirtieth birthday was approaching.

“Lord bless you, Sir,” broke in Keziah, “it’s not so much after all; you’re both of you lads, Sir—begging your pardon for makin’ so bold. My eldest boy is forty-one, Sir, come Martinmas, which I’ve not seen him for eighteen years; but as I says, the Lord is good, and I make sure as he’ll come home from the seas some day. When they once gets into furrin parts there’s no knowin’ when they’ll come back. Is there any more news of they fightin’ Frenchmen, Sir?”

“There has been more bloodshed, Keziah; it’s sad, very sad!”

“’Tis, indeed, Sir. Good Lord deliver us! Battle, murder, and sudden death, as you says on a Sunday, Sir, good Lord deliver us.”

“And now, Keziah, I shall trust to you

to do credit to the vicarage to-morrow, and have everything nice."

"Trust me, Sir, I'll see to it. That lazy gal, Jane, shall be out o' bed betimes; she'd a-lied there snoring till six this mornin' if I'd a-let her, as I says she should be up wi' the sun all the year round, and afore it in the winter; and the sun's right atop of the big elm tree by six o'clock o' mornin's now; but gals is gals, as I says, and they don't grow no better since my young days. Shall I clear the glasses, Sir?"

The old servant went out, and Bart Broderick sat down in his easy chair, and thought over the conversation of the evening; and notwithstanding the Squire's arguments, he was still bothered with a guilty feeling that he was doing too little and enjoying life too much. He sat up much later than usual thinking over it, and contrasting the pinched life of his

early years with the comfort he now enjoyed.

When a lad he had bravely faced the fact that he would have to start in the world without a penny to call his own, and that he would have to fight the battle of life as his father had done.

There was only one thing he was determined to avoid, and that was an early marriage. The struggles that were made to bring up the eleven children, and the miserable dependence there was on rich relatives, had impressed him so strongly that he determined to keep a guard over his affections. This was perhaps the reason that he seemed to shun female society ; and also the reason, perhaps, that he gave the whole strength of his warm heart to his cousin.

That good conscience of his was now becoming a perpetual torment to him.

Was it right for him to take life so easily? he was continually asking himself. Was it right to be so dependent on his cousin's bounty? Ought he not to go to some crowded parish and do real hard work, and live on a miserable stipend? If he left, would his cousin attend to the duties of his position, and marry and settle down, as no doubt he ought to do? or would he turn reckless? Ah! that was just possible. This was at least a consoling thought.

It was pleasant to think he was of some use to his cousin. He sat arguing with himself in this way till he shivered with cold, for it was a chilly May night, or rather morning by this time, and the last spark of fire had gone out. He need scarcely have been in such a hurry to put an end to his happiness.

Fate generally arranges these things for us, and does not allow us too long a spell

of prosperity. A blow was already in store, and the days of the snug little bachelor dinners, and cosy evenings, and long walks were numbered.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Parson Broderick awoke in the morning the sun was far beyond the elm tree, and quite out of Keziah's computation. He threw open the window and let in the scent of hawthorns and lilacs. It was one of those lovely May mornings which make us forget all about the east winds and night chills and general treacherousness of the month. Near the window were a ruddy pink hawthorn and a golden laburnum, each trying to outvie the other in brilliancy. The tender green of the lime leaves contrasted with the dark purplish brown of the purple

beech, and the blue sky—that deep blue which weather-prophets know forebodes storm—made a fit setting for all these lovely colours. Just a faint wind stirred the leaves and caused the delicious odour of the flowers to travel to the open window. A blackbird and thrush were measuring notes with each other in a tall sumach at the end of the garden, their wives and families being below ; the blackbird's in a laurel bush and the thrush's in an arbor vitæ. The parson sat on the window-ledge thoroughly taking in all this at every pore of his skin. It was utter delight to him. He forgot for a time all his scruples. On such a day as this to live, to exist, is enough.

The striking of the church clock warned him of the lateness of the morning, and also brought to his mind that it was the day for meeting Miss Green to “ settle the hymns.” It was his custom to meet her

in the church at eleven o'clock ; not that his presence was necessary, for he allowed her to fix what hymns she pleased without opposition.

Breakfast over and various duties performed, he went out at the little wicket-gate which led from his garden into the churchyard. Instead of walking straight into the church, as was his custom, he went round to look at the little marble cross on the left side. He had often noticed it, because it was a noticeable object, but he had never taken the trouble to read the inscription.

“So that’s his romance,” he thought to himself. “Olivia Arnold, born August the twenty-third, eighteen hundred and forty-one, died July the fourteenth, eighteen hundred and sixty, scarcely nineteen years old. Poor thing ! I suppose he has never met anyone since that he thought equal to her ; or is it that I—”

“Hullo, Bart!” said a cheery voice, “what are you doing here? you look quite sentimental. You don’t call this settling the hymns, do you? I thought I should find you in the church, in the tender embraces of Miss Green.”

“Hush, Thornton! Some one might hear and make mischief.”

“No fear of anyone hearing anything while she’s pounding away on that organ. It’s enough to frighten the young rooks out of their nests. Fancy spoiling this glorious day with that hideous row.”

“She means it for the glory of God, you know, Thorn, and everyone’s efforts should be appreciated.”

“I don’t think the glory of God troubles her very much. It’s the glory of man she wants. She likes to make a stir in the place, and be a general sort of busybody and worry everyone in

her own household. I've no patience with women of that sort."

"It's your birthday, Thorn. Many happy returns, old boy."

"Thanks. It's a right royal birthday too, isn't it? Just look at the colour of the sky. I was out early this morning, poking about in the grounds, looking after various matters, and the birds were positively shouting as if for joy. A day of this sort makes one so light and well. I felt as if I could have shouted out a *Te Deum* with the birds."

"And I sat on the window-ledge this morning sniffing the air till I got quite late for breakfast, instead of having done an hour's study before. I think, after all, this is the best time of the year, for there is such a freshness everywhere, and such rich colour and scent in the lilacs, and laburnums, and hawthorns, and

the spring flowers too are so freshly scented."

"Yes, the spring is lovely, but I think I care most for autumn; its repose is soothing, and there is just a touch of melancholy which I like. But what a couple of sensuous fellows we are, Bart!"

"Sensuous!"

"Yes, sensuous. Don't we enjoy everything that appeals to our senses?"

"Yes, but we have a right to enjoy Nature."

"And do you suppose that God meant you only to enjoy his trees and flowers and no other part of his creation? Don't you thank Him when you see a pretty girl; or a fine horse; or a fine man? Don't I thank God every day for letting me have such a dear old boy as you for a friend, eh, Bart?" slapping him on the shoulder.

“Your notions are very odd, Thorn; it takes one some time to understand them.”

“I shouldn’t call them odd myself, but natural. If I find myself in a world where a great deal is done that neither I nor my fellow-creatures can accomplish, I naturally suppose there is some greater Power that has achieved it all; and when I realise pleasureable sensations, I am naturally grateful to that Power. But I must say, Bart, there are often moments when I think there’s another great power, an evil one, pulling just the opposite way to God. I don’t wonder that Satan was invented.”

“Hush, Thorn! I’m sure we don’t want to have anything to do with Satan.”

“No, my dear boy, that’s exactly what I say. But Satan, or some unpleasant fellow of that sort, *will* have something to do with us, that’s what I complain

of. I had just planned various schemes of what I want to do for the next few months—in fact, you know, Bart, I really mean to turn over a new leaf and look after things a bit, and now I have a telegram from my aunt, from Brighton, to say she is very bad and I must go to her at once.”

“Oh!” said the parson, looking rather downcast, “the change will do you good, and you’ll enjoy the sea air. Is Miss Meadows very ill?”

“I suppose she is, as the telegram is from some strange person, but she always makes a good deal of a finger ache—when the finger is her own; though she doesn’t like other people to be ailing. Here it is: from Mrs. Carstairs; ‘Miss Meadows is seriously ill, and begs you will come to see her without delay.’”

“You don’t seem in a hurry, Thorn; perhaps the poor creature is dying.”

"I don't think so. My aunt Arabella is not the one to die off quietly; she'll want a good deal of ceremony before she departs. And it's no good hurrying when the only train I can get to fit in with the Brighton one starts at two. I suppose I shall only be away a day or two, but it's very annoying just now."

"Miss Green will be wondering where I am; will you come in with me?"

They entered the church, where Miss Sophia Green sat playing the organ. As they approached her she looked up, first with a smile of welcome, but a shade passed over her face as she saw the Squire. Looks will often express more than words, and Miss Green's look plainly said, "*That man again; no wonder he's late.*"

But an artificial smile was soon assumed; for when a man is unmarried and rich he can generally com-

mand smiles, even though he be not orthodox. Had it been John Tucker, the ditcher, who was always finding an excuse for staying away from church on the one day when he was not engaged in hedging and ditching—either his “old bones ached that dreadful,” or his “missus was took bad”—Miss Green would have delivered a lecture on his sinfulness; but Squire Meadows was a different person. He might do the most outrageous things, and Miss Green would still smile on him.

“Ah! Mr. Meadows,” she said in her blindest manner, “how do you do?” We don’t often see *you* in church, eh?” in a tone of banter, and shaking her finger at him playfully. “Neither Mr. Broderick’s sermons nor my music seem to be enough to attract you.”

“No, I read my friend Broderick’s sermons before he preaches them, and

touch them up sometimes, don't I, Bart? and as to music, well—I think I may say, without detracting from your performance, Miss Green, that I prefer the song of birds and the rustling of leaves to the noise of this somewhat wheezy instrument.”

“Ah! that is just like you; you always were so funny, Mr. Meadows. But you know you might enjoy both, as you could listen to the birds on week days.”

“True, I could *listen* to both. But you see if I came to hear your music, Miss Green, I must at the same time inhale the damp and mouldy smell which hangs about this church, and which is certainly not conducive to pious thoughts.”

“Oh, fie, fie! Mr. Meadows. I'm ashamed of you.”

The form of “settling the hymns” for the following Sunday was gone through,

and the three left the church, the parson carrying away the keys.

“I’m going to trouble you for an early bit of lunch, Broderick, as I’m done out of that dinner you promised me, so I’ll follow you if you please. Good morning, Miss Green.”

Miss Green managed to put on an acid sort of smile as she shook hands with the two gentlemen, but as she turned away she looked positively ferocious. This Tuesday “settling of hymns” generally brought her *tête-à-tête* with the parson, not only in the church, but in a little walk of about a quarter of a mile to the schools, where she went to inform the schoolmaster of the hymns to be practised by the children for the following Sunday. Why so sedate and mature a lady as Miss Sophia Green should care for conversation with so young and immature a gentleman as Mr. Broderick (for he was in some

respects as simple as a child), it is impossible to say. But that she did care was evident from her very black looks at being disappointed on this occasion. Her way lay in an opposite direction from the vicarage, and she hurried out of the churchyard with the step of a person enraged and balked, and almost stumbled over the little marble cross as she turned the path by the corner where it stood. On she hurried down the road, unmindful of the cuckoo, who was shouting his loudest in the neighbouring copse, unmindful of the thousand delicious scents and sounds that filled the air. Miss Green was certainly not sensuous. No : she was sedate and prim ; prim at least to the world.

“ I can’t bear that woman,” said Thornton Meadows to his cousin as they passed through the vicarage gate. “ She always rubs me up the wrong way, and makes me feel inclined to say savage things.”

“And, you know, Thorn, you *are* rather savage in your behaviour to her, aren't you?”

“It's the only way to keep her at a distance. She's like a corkscrew wriggling into a cork. Ugh! I declare she's made this glorious day seem dull and cold. She's like a thing of evil omen. I feel as though a dark cloud had come over us.”

CHAPTER VI.

MISS ARABELLA MEADOWS, when she retired from her post as mistress at Overton Hall, commenced a life of general gaiety at watering-places, both foreign and English, a life that seems particularly fascinating to unattached ladies of a certain age. Her own private income having been carefully treasured up, and allowed to accumulate, during the years she lived with her brother, she had now a capital that represented more than the income she derived from the funded property of the family; and, what was very pleasant to her, this money was

absolutely her own to dispose of, whereas the regular income would, at her death, return to its original source.

If Miss Arabella took advantage of this bit of money to keep those about her in awe of her—a sort of remember-you-in-my-will manner—she was no worse than a great many other people.

There are thousands who do the same thing, and tens of thousands who are servile for the sake of what they may get. So let us not blame Miss Arabella if she hugged this bit of money to her heart. She had been about six months in Brighton, whither she had repaired from the Continent on the outbreak of the war, when she telegraphed for her nephew. When he arrived he was received by a handsome lady, who appeared to be about five and thirty, and who, he soon learnt, was Mrs. Carstairs.

Miss Arabella had on leaving Overton

very soon discarded her maid, and employed instead a useful companion. By doing this she got all the service that a maid would give, added to the thousand and one things that those poor ladies known as useful companions are expected to do. Well-educated poverty will always put up with a great deal more than ignorant poverty, and be willing to do twice as much. A lady's maid is, as a rule, a hindrance rather than a help in moving about from place to place. Miss Arabella soon discovered all this for herself, and engaged a useful companion. But she seems to have been too exacting even for such willing drudges as these ladies usually are, and not even the prospect of being remembered in her will had been sufficient to keep them to her allegiance, for Mrs. Carstairs was the fourth she had tried. She had served her now for about two months, and was, as Miss

Arabella said, everything that could be desired. But a very observant person might have noticed that, though Mrs. Carstairs seemed to be almost more humble in her manner than occasion required, she was gradually acquiring a certain power over the old lady.

Miss Arabella had always taken great pains to impress upon those about her the importance of her position, as sometime mistress of Overton Hall and aunt of the present Squire. Mrs. Carstairs was by this time thoroughly acquainted with the family history, for she had managed to make the old lady enter into more detail with her than anyone else had done. There was a fascination about her which seemed irresistible. She had a soft pink and white complexion, regular little features, dark hair and eyes, the latter shaded by long lashes, and a dove-like voice and manner. She seemed to be full

of sympathy, always ready to listen to a tale of trouble or grief, and as she listened cooing out soft little nothings here and there, which were very soothing. She appeared to be always troubling about the concerns of others, and never about herself. In short she seemed to be a piece of perfection, and Miss Arabella congratulated herself on having found such a treasure. It was by Mrs. Carstairs' suggestion that the Squire had been summoned.

“Don't you think, dear lady,” she said one day, “that you should see the Squire. I don't want to make you think you are worse than you are, but I feel that it is a responsibility on my shoulders, and I should be more comfortable about it if the family knew of your illness. Your nieces would hardly be able to leave their families; besides Mr. Meadows, as head of the family, ought to come and look after you.”

“I don’t know ; I don’t think the boy cares much about me ; he’s got no heart for anything ; he’s not like one of us.”

“Don’t say that. I dare say he loves you very much, but is not very demonstrative. I’m sure I might say the same of my little daughter. That child does not seem to care a bit about me, though I worship her.”

“I might send him a line, or you could for me. Perhaps if he sees I’m not well enough to write for myself, he may think it is serious, and come. We must use a little diplomacy with him, for he’s an odd character, and as I am afraid, very hard-hearted. I’m sure the pains I’ve taken to make that boy feel when he was a child, no one would believe. Chapter after chapter have I made him learn of the Bible when he had done wrong ; and hour after hour did I have Mr. Field and Mr. Martin, the clergymen, both very good

men, to admonish him. Sometimes he has been locked a whole day in the lumber-room; but it was all no good. I believe, and his dear father used to believe, that he was born without a heart."

"Don't you think if I were to telegraph he might be more impressed with the seriousness of the case and come at once?"

"Perhaps he would; but there's no knowing. Anyone might be dying before he'd move an inch."

"I think myself, dear lady, that when you can get about again a change to your native air would be very beneficial. Couldn't you stay at the Hall for a few weeks?"

"Well, I suppose as I came away of my own accord I could go back for a short time. He could hardly be graceless enough to make any objection. But you'd come with me, wouldn't you? I

should never care to be left alone at the Hall with that boy. He's too trying."

"I would not leave you. The only thing, as you know, that ever troubles me is the child; and I could hardly expect the Squire would take her too; and I have been counting, oh! how much you can't tell, on the pleasure you were going to afford me of having her here for the holidays. But don't trouble about me, dear lady; I am ready to make the sacrifice, and the child must bear her disappointment."

"I don't see why she shouldn't come too. There's room enough in the Hall, and servants enough, goodness knows! from what my niece tells me I think it would be a charity to go down and put things in order. Yes, perhaps you'd better telegraph. Suppose you wait till to-morrow morning; that will give him time to get down the same day."

And so the telegram was sent which brought the Squire down. What he thought about it, and what he arranged, can be gathered from the following letter to the Reverend Bartholomew Broderick :—

“ The Bedford,

“ Tuesday night.

“ Dear Bart,

“ I found my aunt much as I expected, with nothing particular the matter, and half-a-dozen people buzzing about her. First, there is her companion—such a pretty woman. I know you’ll fall in love with her, Bart! Useful companion my aunt calls her: but I should say she was lady’s-maid and secretary and general drudge all in one. I do pity her, poor thing. Then there’s the doctor, a pompous fellow, who thinks a good deal of himself; he’s evidently grown rich on old ladies’

fancies : and is just the sort of man my aunt likes. He solemnly told me that there was no immediate danger—no cause for alarm—but that the nerves were unhinged, and great care in the treatment of the case was necessary.

“Nerves, indeed! As if my aunt had any! I should say a good shaking would do her more good than anything. She ought to change places with her companion for a year. I can’t bear to see the poor thing drudging away so patiently, and giving up all thought of herself for that selfish old woman.

“Then there’s the landlady of the house and her daughter and a couple of servants all my-ladying and koo-tooing to this one piece of humanity, because, forsooth, she has a little money. It’s sickening.

“Her last notion is that she’ll not get better till she ‘breathes her native

air,' as she puts it; and she wants me to stay here till she's well enough to travel, and then escort her to Overton. Pleasant, isn't it? You know how I hate this place. It is suggestive of every vice and vulgarity that can be connected with money. It stinks of money. I said I thought I'd better go back to-morrow, and come down again when my aunt could travel; but poor Mrs. Carstairs cast such an imploring look at me that I gave way; for although the poor creature never utters a word of complaint, I can see she has a dreadful time of it. I suppose she thought it might make things better if I stayed. So I shall not be back for about a week, and when I do come I shall bring my aunt and her suite, which consist of Mrs. Carstairs and a little girl of nine years old! There's a household for you! But this will make no

difference to *us*, you know. My aunt will have her companion to look after her, and I shall go my own way as usual.

“ Always yours,

“ T. M.

“ P.S. Wednesday.—I carried this out to post myself this morn, and went first to my Aunt’s to see how she was, and found there Mrs. Carstairs’ little girl, who is to accompany us. She is such a charming child, has quite the opposite sort of beauty to her mother’s, and reminds me of my ideal. I declare I’m quite in love with the little thing. She’s a regular little goddess.

“ T. M.”

“ Ah !” thought Mr. Broderick as he threw the letter down on the table after reading it, “ ‘pity is akin to love,’ they say.”

CHAPTER VII.

MISS ARABELLA MEADOWS'S return to Overton Hall after an absence of three and a half years, was quite an event. No definite period was fixed for her stay; her nephew had merely asked her to remain till her health was restored.

In making her travelling arrangements she had suggested to Mrs. Carstairs that she would simply require enough clothes for a month (for she had a very extensive wardrobe), but the companion had urged the necessity of a longer stay to be of any real benefit. With her

dove-like voice she had said to her mistress :

“ There is nothing more likely to cure such a malady as yours than your native air. Were it a fever, or consumption, or any specific disease, special treatment would be required ; but the doctor assures me it is entirely on the nerves, and I have known such cases before, and seen the good result of a return to native air. One month, dear lady, could do no good. Let me entreat you to consider your health before your inclination. It is our duty to sacrifice our desires to our good. I daresay you find the Hall dull, but you will have enough to do if your health permit to visit your old friends and receive them. You know I shall be only too glad to serve you in any way, and to save you from fatigue. Do let me persuade you for your own sake to try what two or three months will do.”

As she said this she took up the thin white bejewelled hand of the old lady, and stroked it as lovingly as though it were her mother's. This prostration of herself, and offering up of her whole being, were very acceptable to Miss Arabella. She liked allegiance from anyone, but to get it from a handsome, clever woman—from such a very “superior woman,” as she termed her—was especially pleasing.

Thus she was easily conquered; she who had all her life ruled others—ruled them by her ignorant, obstinate, narrow-minded virtue. A pink and white face and a dove-like voice had positively succeeded in penetrating that armour of prejudice and narrow-mindedness.

So Miss Arabella made a ceremonious re-entry into Overton Hall, and very soon marshalled the servants into order, and brought back the ancient tradition

of it. It is a curious fact, and an unpleasant one to a student of human nature, that servants will work and behave much better under a hard master than a kind one. That there must be a great difference between one who serves and one who is served is obvious. But is it necessary that the server should be treated as a mere machine? Miss Arabella would have been very properly shocked had anyone asked her if she approved of slavery; but it never occurred to her that her own servants were little else than slaves, save that they could terminate their slavery when they chose.

Thornton Meadows on the other hand looked upon servants as fellow-creatures who were accidentally placed in a different position from himself, and considered that this position of dependence gave them a claim to his consideration and courtesy.

“Courtesy to a servant, indeed!” Aunt Arabella remarked, when the subject was rife two days after her arrival. “You’d soon have the whole pack of them your masters!”

Which was right may be left to the reader to decide; but it is quite certain that Miss Meadows could command the most exact service, and that her nephew, when left to himself, fared very badly for any service at all, except from his faithful old coachman. The lady, with all her narrow-mindedness, was, perhaps, after all the best judge of human nature.

This “settling of the servants” as Miss Arabella termed it, had been productive of several unpleasant words. It was soon discovered that one of the maids was what the lady called a Papist. This was too dreadful to be borne. Her instant dismissal was demanded on the discovery.

But Thornton Meadows did not see the matter in that light.

“One religion is as good as another,” said he, “if it makes people conscientious and anxious to do what is right. I don’t mean to let that girl go, for I believe she’s better than most of the others, and she was recommended by Father Brandon, for whom I have a great regard.”

“Good Heavens !” said Miss Arabella, using an oath which she only allowed herself on very special occasions. “Why, we shall have Jesuits in the house next !”

This conversation, which took place at breakfast time, had been altogether too much for her nerves, and she retired, followed by her faithful companion ; while Thornton Meadows went down to the stables, taking with him little Isabel Carstairs, and Laddie following. Isabel, named after Mrs. Carstairs, was a pretty,

brown-haired, blue-eyed girl, rather tall for her age. She was especially attractive to Thornton, because of her likeness to the pretty Olivia, for whom he had entertained such a romantic affection. She seemed to him to be like her in manner as well as face, for one moment she would be full of life and gaiety, and another full of dignity, as though she were already grown up.

At first she was reserved, and treated Thornton as though she were not quite sure of him; but gradually she became more familiar and began to chatter to him of all that was in her mind. An anxious look would sometimes settle on her bright little face, and the blue eyes would look as though filling with tears at some unpleasant thought.

As she ran along with Thornton and Laddie, her pretty hair flying with the breeze, for she had run out through the

window without stopping to put a hat on, she said,

“Oh, this is so lovely!”

“What is?” said Thornton. “I call this an ugly dull place.”

“I think it’s beautiful,” she said, “very beautiful; but it won’t last, will it?”

“What won’t last?”

“All this, you and Laddie, and everything. I shall lose it all, shan’t I?”

“Why, you funny little girl, you would’nt want to be here always, would you?”

“Oh, yes, always! It’s all so nice.”

“Do you like it better than school?”

“Yes, and better than everything.” She put her hand into Thornton’s and looked up at him, as if to tell him how much she loved him. Then Laddie ran up, rather jealously, disapproving evidently of his master being too intimate with anyone besides himself. He put his

cold nose in the other hand and claimed his share of love.

"Dear Laddie," said Isabel, patting the dog, "let me love him too, won't you?"

"Laddie and I are such old friends," said Thornton.

"And I'm only a new friend, ain't I?" said the child sadly.

"I daresay we shall soon be very good friends though, don't you think so? You can love me as you did your father, can't you?"

"But I didn't love papa. You won't tell mamma, will you? because she says it's wicked when I say that. Papa wasn't kind to us. He used to go away for such a long time, and sometimes mamma was so poor; and then he would come and give her a lot of money, and stay a little time, and sometimes we were very happy, and sometimes he beat her and me too." The child shuddered at the remembrance.

“He’s dead now and can never beat you again, little one, can he?”

“No, I’m so glad,” she said, getting closer, “he’ll never come back again, mamma says, because he was drowned.”

Thornton Meadows had been very much irritated during breakfast time by his aunt’s remarks. Several things had angered him. He felt a sort of righteous anger at his aunt’s narrowness in wanting to turn away a girl because she belonged to a different branch of the Christian religion from herself. Then he was angry with himself, because he felt that it was his duty to humour his aunt, and to keep peace in the house, and that so far from doing this he had been tempted to speak more strongly than the occasion required. Then he was angry with human nature, because he felt that his aunt was right concerning the way in which servants should be treated. His pet

theories of human nature were always collapsing.

In this state of irritation instinct led him to call the child and the dog, and to go to the stable for a chance of finding the coachman. Keeley was always good and true, whatever happened, he knew; but before he could reach Keeley he was already somewhat soothed. With Laddie's cold nose in one hand, and Isabel's nervous fingers in the other, and her pretty blue eyes turned to his, and the soft brown hair flying over the sleeve of his coat, he felt that there was some good in life after all; and the pained expression in his face gradually wore off.

When he reached the stables he found Keeley speaking in loud tones and using rather rough language to a groom, who had evidently done his work in a slovenly manner.

"Beg pardon, Sir," he said, in quite a

different tone, as he turned round and caught sight of his master and saluted him. "I was putting it on a little strong, Sir, because you can't make these fellows understand unless you do. You must keep them under or you can't manage them. Hope it was no offence to the little lady, Sir."

"I don't suppose she noticed your expletives, Keeley. It seems an odd thing that people won't work for fair words."

"But they won't, Sir, I can tell you."

"But you always go on right, Keeley, why can't the others?"

"Well, you see, Sir, I've thought it all over like. I've never give in to temptation, Sir, though I won't say as I ain't tempted sometimes. The devil, he says to me sometimes, Bob Keeley, you take it easy, and trust they boys to do the work; and it's two to one at times but

what I give in. But I pulls up sharp at the last minute and gets the better of old gentleman. Oh ! he has a good pull on all of us sometimes, Sir, the devil does, take my word for it. I always feel by the time Saturday night comes round that I'm getting too far into the broad road, as they call it in the Bible, and that I must start clear again in the narrow one on Sunday morning."

"I wish everyone kept in the right road as well as you do, Keeley, it would be a much pleasanter world. It seems to me that life isn't worth having if one is always to be scolding and keeping one's fellow-creatures in order."

"Well, I don't know, Sir, we wants a little variety. Some of us must be masters and some servants; but it's certain sure the masters must hold a high hand. You be too soft-hearted, Sir,

and Parson Broderick too. You should forget all about their feelings, and order 'em about as if they were logs of wood. And Parson, he should give it 'em hot in church, a little hell-fire and that sort of thing, instead of talking to them like brothers and sisters."

"He wants to persuade them by good words to do what is right, and not frighten them by fear of punishment. Don't you like him a great deal better than Mr. Martin, who gave you quite enough hell-fire and everything else unpleasant, eh, Keeley?"

"Like 'un, Sir? Why, we can't help liking him. You've only to look in Parson's face and like him. But it strikes me, Sir, begging your pardon for making so bold, that if you and Parson was left to govern the country, the roughs would soon get the best of it. There are lots of 'em as has no hearts at all, Sir, take

my word for it. And my lady and Mr. Martin's the ones for them."

"Yes, I think Miss Meadows has put us all in order again, eh, Keeley?"

"Well, Sir, I'm glad to see they servants put down a bit, and made to work; but, Lord, Sir, I'd be proud to drive a lady of your own, and see some lads and lassies like that young missie about the place."

Isabel and Laddie were having a doggie conversation all to themselves in the stable-yard.

"There's time enough for that, Keeley," said the Squire, laughing, and walking away. "Come along little'un, come, Laddie. Let's see if we can find the parson. Let me see," looking at his watch, "it's Monday morning; I think we shall just catch him. We'll come through this gate and cross the road into the churchyard."

The Squire knew the parson's movements as well almost as he knew them himself, and could generally calculate on the exact place to find him on any day and at any hour, unless he had been called out to a sick person. Most of the poor in the parish considered the parson as necessary as the doctor in illness; and some, in fact, more so; perhaps because he was the parish almoner, and could provide those good things which a doctor can do no more than order. Moreover the doctor lived some three miles away from the village, and the parson was often applied to in an emergency.

Thornton Meadows with his dog and little companion crossed the road, and went in at the west gate of the churchyard, and round the path by the marble cross.

“What a pretty grave this is!” said the child.

"Yes, I always have that kept pretty, because a very pretty lady was buried there."

"Was she your relation?"

"No; but I admired her very much, and she died when she was quite young, a great many years ago."

"How old was she?"

"Read that and see if you can find out."

"O-li-via," the child began, doubtfully; "what a funny name!"

"Olivia! 'tis a pretty name; don't you think so?"

"I never heard it; there are no girls at our school with that name. Do you like it better than my name? I am always called Bella."

"I don't like your name because it reminds me of some one who has a very bad temper."

His aunt was called Bella by the very

few of her friends who dared such familiarity.

“Then I wish I had another name. I should like to change to Olivia.” She looked wistfully at the cross as though she envied the dead her name, and went on reading: “‘Olivia Arnold, born August the 23rd, 1841; died July the 14th.’ Why, that’s my birthday!”

“Is it? How strange! Let me see, how old are you?”

“I shall be nine next month.”

“Nine? Ah, then, you weren’t born till two years after that lady died. If it had been the same day, I should have become a firm believer in the transmigration of souls.”

“What’s that?”

“Never mind, little ’un; it’s something I was saying to myself that you wouldn’t understand. Let’s come and find the parson.”

They passed through the little wicket gate into the vicarage garden, and then up to the parlour window, which was open.

"He's not there," said Thornton; "come along, Laddie, we know our way, don't we?"

Label followed them down by the side of the house to the garden at the back, then across a lawn to a shady corner where was a summer-house, or rather a garden-seat and table, with a circular roof for shelter.

"Gone to the consolers again! Oh, Bart, this is bad, very bad, at this time in the morning too!"

The two friends had agreed that tobacco was certainly one of God's gifts which were meant for our use; but that it was no more to be counted as an everyday necessity than medicine is. The habit of smoking, which some years

back they had both acquired—at a time when every male over fourteen seemed to consider it an indispensable part of his daily life—they had given up; and it was only on occasions that they indulged themselves.

They were both men of nervous temperament—men who would bear great troubles well enough, but would be irritated by the small annoyances of everyday life. They had come to regard tobacco as the consoler for the small troubles of existence, and only resorted to it when there was good reason to do so, or at least when they persuaded themselves there was good reason; for it is to be feared they occasionally enjoyed a smoke on a very small pretext.

The Parson was, perhaps, the greater sinner in this respect; though he could certainly find more excuses than the

Squire. A country parson's life is often looked upon as idyllic. The pretty vicarage with its half-dozen acres of glebe land, the picturesque church, the patriarchal position of the vicar with regard to his flock, and his social position with the richer members of it, make up what appears to be a very pleasant state of things.

But Mr. Broderick did not always find things altogether pleasant, though he often reproached himself for leading an easy, careless life.

"What's gone wrong this time?" said Thornton.

"Oh, a lot of things—only little things; but they *do* worry me."

"What are they?"

"Why, there's Mrs. Markham fallen out with the teacher, and Miss Green takes the teacher's part; and Markham says if Miss Green's going to interfere

with his wife, he shall leave; and you know I could never get such a capital schoolmaster again."

"Well, my dear fellow, that's easily settled. Miss Green will do exactly as you bid her."

"But you don't suppose, Thorn, I could ask her to sacrifice her conscience for my sake. Besides, you must know how much I dislike having any altercation with her. And that isn't the only thing. There was a note sent round from Miss Bonsor last evening to ask if I was aware that Mrs. Shepherd who came up for the sacrament yesterday was inebriated on Saturday evening and making a disturbance at the 'Bell and Bottle;' and Keziah tells me that old Honeysett, for whom I got up a subscription paper because his cow died, actually killed the animal when he found it was ailing, and carried it to

Abington Market for sale as meat. And then—but there I'm bothering you with all these things, and they must seem such trifles to you; but really, Thorn, these things do annoy me, and lately, you know, they—well, I suppose I've got more irritable."

"I know what you mean, Bart; you haven't had me to talk them over with; but never mind, old boy, it won't last long. The old lady's been here a week to-morrow, and I suppose she won't stay more than another three."

At this moment little Isabel, who had been standing at the Squire's side, suddenly put her hand in his, and looked up at him wistfully.

"What is it, little 'un?" he said. "Come and speak to the parson. Give him your hand. What do you think of her, Bart? She says she'd like to live here always. 'Pon my word, I

wouldn't mind keeping her. We could educate her between us, couldn't we?"

"That would mean keeping some one else, wouldn't it? Ah, Thorn! I believe you're smitten."

"Nonsense, Bart, nonsense; not at all my sort. No fear there, I can assure you. Run along, child, and have a game with Laddie on the lawn," turning to little Isabel. "Don't suppose, my dear fellow, that, because I don't come round and bother you for some dinner, I am particularly happy at home. Far from it. I have to listen to my aunt's platitudes night after night. But if you saw how that poor Mrs. Carstairs is bullied, and how patiently she bears it, and how appealingly she looks to me for help, you wouldn't wonder that I put up with a great deal to make matters pleasanter for her. I can't bear to

see a well-bred woman, as she appears to be, treated as a mere drudge. I believe my aunt thinks that servants, including useful companions, are mere machines, who are to be set going or kept at rest according to her will. I believe from what the child says that the poor woman has been through great troubles. Her husband seems to have treated her badly, and now that he is dead she has to make a living as best she can, and educate her child. I really feel sorry for her, and should be glad to help her to some more pleasant mode of existence than serving my aunt; but as to marrying her—well—it never entered my head, for she's not the sort of woman I should choose for a wife. So you needn't think there's anything in my interest in her beyond pity."

"She is handsome, as you say, but I should never fall in love with her myself. There's a certain something in her, a sort of quiet look of determination that makes me feel she would master any fellow."

"Nonsense, Bart! She's as gentle as a dove. You're so weak-minded where women are concerned; you think all women are viragoes, like Miss Green."

"Maybe. But I can't marry, so it's no good troubling my head with what I think of women."

"What I came round for, Bart, was to ask you if you'd come up to the Hall to dine occasionally while the old lady's here. I know it isn't comfortable for you, for she's sure to be nasty, and talk *at* you; but it isn't for long, and it'll help me out with the evenings, and make it pleasanter for poor Mrs.

Carstairs. Won't you come as a favour to me? Come to-night."

"Thanks, of course I'll come if you wish it; but I believe Miss Meadows would rather I kept away. She doesn't love me."

"That's no loss to you, Bart. One would think that child had been in prison all her life, she seems to enjoy herself so much here."

"How old is she?"

"Scarcely nine."

"I should have thought her older."

"I'm half inclined to offer to have her educated. I like the child."

"It would help the mother. Still if the child has nothing to look to, it would be a pity to educate her beyond her station in life."

"There you are with some of your worldly wisdom, Bart. You can't educate a person beyond his station, because the

education makes him equal to any station, and I don't see how it can stand in the way of his getting a living. It's ridiculous."

"That's your theory, Thorn, and might hold good if every one was educated——"

"As I hope they will be in time."

"And then parsons will be out of work."

"Yes, because we shall all be philosophers."

"And all make as good use of our philosophy as you do, eh? Get along with you, Thorn! I believe you come to grief oftener over your philosophy than I do over my Christianity, notwithstanding my troubles with Miss Green and the schoolmaster, and Mrs. Shepherd and old Honeysett. There! I've finished my smoke, and it's about time I went to look after things."

He took the Squire's arm, and they

walked together to the house, and then through the churchyard to the stable-gate, where they parted; Laddie and Isabel following the Squire in through the gate.

“Shall I really go in three weeks?” said Isabel, looking up at the Squire.

“Three weeks?”

“Yes, you told the clergyman Miss Meadows would stay three weeks, and mamma told me I should stay here all the holidays, and they haven’t really begun yet, because I came away before.”

“We’ll see, dear. Perhaps I’ll send you to another school; we must ask mamma about it. I’ll take care of you, little one.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT curious question of "woman's rights" is for ever perplexing the minds of a few men and fewer women. There is, perhaps, no greater enemy to woman than a "woman's rights" woman. The true woman knows her power, and is satisfied with it; and she knows also that if her rights are to be defined, and a line drawn as between man and woman, her power is at an end. Did not Eve know how to coax Adam to eat the apple? And have not women been tempting and coaxing and influencing men from the time of Eve downward?

When Thornton Meadows spoke of Mrs. Carstairs not being the sort of woman he should care to marry, he was looking at the matter only from his own point of view. The lady had already considered it from hers, and the decision was that the Squire was just the sort of man who could be easily caught in her net. So she prepared her net deliberately and slowly, making each knot sure. Miss Arabella was the unconscious instrument by which it was worked, and little Isabel was the material of which it was made.

Had the Squire been on the defensive, he might have escaped. But it was not likely that a man, who was ready to believe implicitly in his fellow-creatures, would suspect such a gentle, dove-like creature as Mrs. Carstairs of endeavouring to entrap him. She seemed to be the very essence of humility and gratitude—almost

abject in her humility. She expressed to Thornton Meadows over and over again her appreciation of her present style of life, and how much more free from trouble it was than the previous years had been. She spoke of times when she had known affluence, and how by the extravagance and neglect of a bad husband she had learnt what suffering and poverty were. The unsuspecting fellow listened to all, and pitied her, and never knew the net was gradually coming round him.

But Mrs. Carstairs with all her wiles would perhaps never have entirely captured him, had it not been for Miss Arabella Meadows.

That lady's visit had already extended to six weeks, to the great chagrin of the butler and the housekeeper, who, to use their own expression, felt they could "stand it no longer and must strike."

The household at Overton Hall was never a large one, and without counting nurses and lady's-maids, who were only required according to circumstances, the traditional number of indoor servants amounted to two men and six women. Of those at present in the house only one woman had been there in Miss Arabella's time.

Thornton Meadows at this time, perhaps, scarcely analysed his own feelings; and had he been asked whether he should wish his aunt's visit to be terminated or prolonged, his first thought would probably have been for little Isabel Carstairs, who had become his daily companion, and whom he had christened Pet, as he objected to the name by which her mother addressed her. But there was no one to ask the question but his friend Broderick, and he was already regarding the state of affairs with an anxiety which precluded

him from asking any questions or making any remarks.

How often it happens that we see our friends walking straight into the mire, and do not warn them, because we think they see where they are going, and would look upon interference as officious. The Parson heaved a good many sighs, and smoked an unusual quantity of tobacco. He sighed when he thought of the break in their pleasant bachelor friendship, but he sighed still more when he thought of the consequences to Thornton, for he had no good opinion of Mrs. Carstairs.

How often in after-years did he wish he had spoken his mind then ! But at the time he felt that it would scarcely seem in good taste ; it might be imputed to jealousy ; to a desire to prevent his friend from being married, lest he should lose the benefits which he derived from

their friendship. So he smoked and sighed, and said nothing.

The climax came one morning when the butler and housekeeper at the Hall asked an audience of their master. Whatever the new state of things may have done to improve, the servants, the housekeeper and the butler very much objected to the improvement on their own part. They had been accustomed to do very much as they liked under the Squire, and what they liked amounted almost to doing nothing at all, except eat and drink at their master's expense.

The Squire, foreseeing that something more would be required of them when his aunt came, had informed them, somewhat apologetically, that Miss Meadows would remain with him for a month, and during that time he expected them to do all in their power to please her. These well-fed, indolent menials

decided that a month might be borne, though it was not borne without many grumbings and consultations in the house-keeper's room. But when it came to six weeks, and there was no sign of Miss Arabella's departure, their overwrought feelings became too much for them, and they endeavoured to inform the Squire as politely as they could that they found it impossible to continue if Miss Meadows was to remain the head of the house.

Now a proper good old English squire would at once have requested them to depart out of the house, and might also, perhaps, have sent a few good round oaths flying after them. But Thornton Meadows, with his pet theories about fellow-creatures, only looked worried and perplexed, and wondered what he had better do. It was hard on the servants he thought, and yet it was hard on his aunt that she must go to please the

servants. Of himself he never thought for one minute.

"I suppose," he said to himself, "one will be able to get on better with the lower classes when they have been educated sufficiently for one to reason with them."

He had learnt by experience that it was utterly useless to reason with them in their present state. Not knowing what to say to these two poor hard-worked creatures, whom he was really pitying in his heart, he told them he would think the matter over and speak to them again. Whereupon he left the room, full of pity for them, and perplexed what to do to please everyone; and they left victoriously congratulating one another that the "Squire was frightened he should lose them."

The result of thinking it over was that Thornton Meadows sought an inter-

view with his aunt, for the purpose of finding out, if possible, without offending her, how long she meant to stay. Unfortunately Miss Arabella was very much out of temper with him and Mrs. Carstairs, and Jones, the butler; but especially with Thornton. She was one of those people who regard, what we common mortals call, a "fit of the sulks," as an expression of self-justification. She was feeling particularly self-justified at this moment. The cause of this can be explained in a few words.

When she first arrived on her visit there had been a little altercation between herself and nephew, as to the position Mrs. Carstairs was to occupy in the family. She was to take her meals with them, because the wary old lady knew that her humble companion would look after her wants better than any servant

did : but when there was a dinner party Miss Arabella asserted the dignity of the family, and was of opinion that a useful companion would be quite out of place at the table. The Squire, with his notions of equality, would not hear of such an arrangement, and pointed out that the lady was well-bred and educated, and that it was positively wicked to put any slight on a person because misfortunes had made her poor. Miss Arabella had given way with a very bad grace, or rather with a want of grace, and the humble companion had always found a place at the table whether there was any company or not. On the evening previous to the day on which Thornton spoke to his aunt, there had been a small dinner-party, and Miss Arabella had informed Mrs. Carstairs that, as there was an equal number of ladies and gentlemen, her presence would make things unequal,

and she would rather she kept away. The useful companion gave way with humility in her manner, but a very different feeling at heart.

When the party sat down at dinner, eight of them, the Squire from his place at the head of the table said :

“Where is Mrs. Carstairs? Is she ill?”

“She is not coming in to-night,” said Miss Arabella with dignity, and in a manner that clearly indicated she meant to be mistress of the situation.

“I hope she’s not ill,” said the Squire, and the subject dropped.

But presently Mrs. Carstairs appeared following Jones, who placed a chair for her and quickly supplied her with what was necessary.

“Excuse me for being late,” she said, in her softest tones, to the Squire. “My duties kept me beyond the time.”

The truth was that Jones, having received orders from Miss Arabella as to the arrangement of the guests at the table, was already aware that Mrs. Carstairs had been left out; and when he heard the Squire ask for her he thought he could pay off a grudge by sending the servant, who was handing him the dishes outside, to tell the companion she "was wanted," which ungracious message she quickly obeyed. This little incident showed she was tolerably safe in offending her mistress for the sake of pleasing the Squire; but it brought her a very severe lecture from Miss Arabella when that lady was unrobing for the night.

When Thornton sought the interview with his aunt, before he could say what was on his mind, she attacked him with his behaviour of the night before.

“What do you mean, Aunt?” he said.

“Why, your sending for that woman before everyone, against my authority.”

“I never sent for her. I can’t think what you mean. I thought she was late; she said she was.”

“That was her excuse of course. I know very well that you told Jones to bring her in. You never had any respect for your elders, and you think you can insult me before everyone.”

“I can assure you, Aunt, I know nothing about it. I quite believed what she said, that her duties had kept her. If I had known that she was ordered not to come in, perhaps I might have said something disagreeable in the heat of the moment, for I do not, and never shall approve of treating cultured people as servants.”

“Of course not! you never do approve

of anything that's right and proper. I shall find you some day sitting down to meals with your own servants. That insolent fellow Jones is in league with you, and fetched the woman in last night on purpose. He knew it would please you, or he wouldn't have done it. And she's a base, designing creature, or she wouldn't have come against my orders. She knew you'd protect her. A nice thing for a country gentleman to be intriguing with women and servants."

"I think, Aunt, you are hardly aware of what you are saying. Something has upset you, and you are exaggerating in your mind some trivial incident."

"Trivial incident, indeed! You don't suppose I can't see what is going on, and why you are taking so much notice of that child. It isn't the child you're thinking of, but the mother, and if

you're going to do that sort of thing, at least you can be gentleman enough to do it out of the house, and not interfere with the dependents in the house, and disgrace your own relations. That woman shall go out of the place this day, and carry on her wickedness elsewhere, and not insult me before my face, and in the presence of my guests."

"Aunt, this is too much! I'll never allow an honest woman to suffer for my sake. If you turn away Mrs. Carstairs in this unjust way, I'll befriend her."

"Befriend her! Oh, yes, and marry her too, perhaps. I'm sure I wonder, with your levelling notions you haven't married a chimney-sweep's daughter before this. Marry her by all means, she'll be an economical wife, for she won't require a lady's-maid. A nice

thing for the Squire of Overton. You need scarcely look for an heir, for I know she's a good deal older than she says, and that child, I believe, is older than she makes out, only she thinks it will make her look old. She's quite capable of telling any falsehood."

Thornton Meadows was now thoroughly roused. He left his aunt's room precipitately, and went to find Mrs. Carstairs. He felt that an injustice had been done to her, and that he was bound to make up for it so far as lay in his power.

Need the rest be told?

Poor Thornton Meadows, with that pitying, unsuspecting nature of his—with that anxiety for the welfare of his fellow-creatures—with that mistaken belief that one man is as good as another!

Wily Mrs. Carstairs, with the pretty pink-and-white face—with the dark

shadowy eyes — with the dove-like
voice.

Eve offered the apple, and Adam did
eat of it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE Squire's marriage astonished everyone but Parson Broderick, but perhaps it astonished no one more than the Squire himself. He seemed to be in a dream, as he afterwards expressed it, a dream in which the pink-and-white face and dark eyes and dove-like voice of Mrs. Carstairs, somehow got mixed up with that other beautiful face that had fascinated him eleven years before. But if he was in a dream, the inhabitants of Overton and the neighbourhood were wide enough awake.

The marriage of the Squire, or of an

heir to the Squirearchy, of Overton, had always been an important event. There were old people, and middle-aged ones, who remembered when Thornton's mother was brought home to the Hall, which had been gorgeously decorated and furnished for her. They remembered also that the Squire had been liberal on that occasion in his gifts in the village, and some wonderment was now expressed as to what the young Squire would do. It was generally agreed that he was a liberal gentleman, but that he had odd notions about giving away, and did not keep up the tradition of the Hall. Everyone had something to say on the subject.

The wedding had taken place in August, just as harvest was commencing. There was a plentiful crop of grain of all sorts, and those who had been forward in getting it in had done well, for now cold

and wet weather set in before the month was out, and did some amount of damage.

But momentous as was the question as to who had got in their corn without damage, and who had not, it was for a few days as nothing compared with the surprise at the news of the Squire's wedding.

The parson was the first to hear of it. The postman usually arrived just as Mr. Broderick finished his breakfast. Keziah's habit was to bring in the letters, and then clear away the breakfast things; and the parson, when the weather was fine, would lounge in the garden as he read his letters. There were sometimes long epistles from the Lincolnshire Rectory, for there were still four unmarried sisters at home, two of whom particularly enjoyed writing to their brother Bart.

It was on one of the damp, chilly August

days that Keziah brought in only one letter, and that in the Squire's handwriting. When the friends were separated they wrote with a frequency that would cause one to wonder what they could possibly find to say; and Keziah, who knew the Squire's writing, took almost as lively an interest in his letters as did the parson himself.

"Here's only one this morning, Sir, an' it's from the Squire, as I knew he'd be lettin' of us know what he be doing in London."

Mr. Broderick opened the letter, and read the few lines it contained.

"An' how he be, Sir?" He did not seem to hear her, as his eyes were still fixed on the letter. "Be he quite well, Sir?" looking up from the tray upon which she was arranging the breakfast things. "Lord-a-mercy, Sir, what is the matter. The Squire be took ill sure—ly.

You've turned so pale all on a sudden, Sir. Is it anything wuss?"

"No," said the parson, with a sickly smile, "he's well enough. But I'm rather taken by surprise, for he tells me he's married."

"Goodness me, Sir! the Squire married! well, I never! Bless his dear heart, whatever did he go for to do it so sudden like?"

"I can't tell, Keziah."

"And ne'er a bell rung, nor a bit o' feasting at the Hall, nor nothing."

"Oh! perhaps that will come after."

"Perhaps it will, when the lady is brought home. But why ever didn't you perform the cer'mony, Sir? To think he should ha' gone and done it without you to do it all like and bind 'em together, and me to say the amens, which I always thought I should ha' done at Squire's weddin'."

Keziah acted as clerk for baptisms and weddings and other ceremonies.

“I suppose he was in a hurry, Keziah.”

“But bless you, Sir, he never is in a hurry for anything, Squire isn’t. He always is a-preaching patience to us. Why, I remember when th’ old Squire was married, although it wasn’t done at church here, there was feasting all through the village; and we had enough wittles given us to last a week a’most. And when my lady came home a month after, and a nice lady she were too, there was more feastin’ and givin’ away, and makin’ merry, an’ it were just afore my third was born, an’ to think that dear lady died soon after, for we all do fade as a leaf, as Elijah says. But who’s the lady, Sir?”

“Mrs. Carstairs,” the parson replied, his face still white.

“Good lord ha’ mercy on us, you don’t

mean that he's married his lady-aunt's waitin'-woman, do you, Sir?"

"She was not a waiting-woman, Keziah," answered the parson somewhat severely, for though he felt angry enough, he also felt he was bound to defend the Squire, and make the best of what seemed to him an unfortunate occurrence.

"Well, Sir, I'll allow she wasn't called the lady's-maid, but Molly the kitchen-wench, as was one o' my girls as you'll remember, Sir, and a tiresome gal she was, says how Mrs. Carstairs did a great deal more nor ever Pearson used to do for my lady, though she did sit at table along o' the family."

"But you don't perceive, Keziah, that education makes all the difference. Mrs. Carstairs is well-educated and well-bred, and you shouldn't encourage foolish girls to gossip."

"Gossip, Sir? I never gossips. But

Molly she comes over to be a bit friendly like, tho' I used to give her a clout o' the head sometimes when she lived here; and as to eddication, Sir, well, I don't see how it can make no difference if a person has no money. Us as works is servants, and them as pays us is masters and missises as the holy Apostle Saint Paul——”

“You don't understand it, Keziah,” said the parson, moving impatiently out of the room, and going to his study, he locked himself in.

“Parson may say what 'un likes,” went on the old woman to herself, “but he don't think no good of it, a-lookin' like a ghost, an' well he may, for no good ever comes o' gentlefolks a-marryin' with servants; and such friends as they dear boys was too; it all comes out of his taking up with that little gal, which I s'pose as he began to feel as he wanted

one of his own, and she's five and thirty if she's a day, and liker forty; poor dear lads, an' I kept such an eye on 'em both, for they wants some one to make 'em comfor'ble, and Squire's a'most as good as parson, and as to parson as Bible says, of such is the kingdom of heaven. Hullo, Jim!"

Keziah was carrying the tray out as she finished her sentence, and turning through the door that shut off the kitchen, caught sight of Jim Watkins, the farmer's son, who had come with the butter.

"Just you tell your father, lad, that the butter didn't turn the pound when I weighed 'un o' Friday. No cheatin' here, Jim! must give parson true weight, a' must, or you knows where ye'll go when you dies. What be the news?"

Jim was not a lad of many ideas. The wisdom of the family centred in Farmer Watkins, to whom Jim always referred

by jerking his thumb over his shoulder and using a personal pronoun.

“Oh! there ain’t no news as I knows on. *He’s* a-grunting like a score o’ pigs a-waitin’ for a feed, and says the weather’s always agin him. If it’s grain he says it’s too wet, and if it’s turmuts he says it’s too dry; and Farmer Brentford he’s got his crop all in.”

“Tell ’un he should come to church then, an’ pray the Lord for fine weather, like Farmer Brentford does; but I’ve news for you, Jim, as’ll make your ’air stand on end.”

“Anything the matter with parson, missis?”

“No, parson’s safe, an’ thank the Lord, but Squire——”

“What, Squire took bad! is he dead? no, you don’t mean that? *he’ll* (pointing the thumb) get his rent raised if he is.”

“He’s not dead, but a’most as bad,

an' it's as like you'll get the rent raised as not, for it's bad times when they sets beggars a-horseback. He's gone and married his lady-aunt's waiting woman."

"Oh my!" said Jim, and he gave a long low whistle.

Keziah then entered into lamentations, as she had done with her master, for she was overflowing with the subject, and glad to get anyone to listen; but Jim was burning to get away and be the first with the news in the village; so he took the chance of a slight pause, for which he had to wait some time, to run off.

Farmer Watkins was the blacksmith's chief crony, and it was not long before these two were having a glass of ale at the "Bell and Bottle" over the news.

"Well, I'm dazed," said the blacksmith, "but that's jest about the funniest thing I've heard for a long time. That's why he'd always got the little gal about with

him; got her ready made, eh Watkins?" giving him a dig in the side.

"Yah!" growled Watkins. "I don't care about that, but I hope as he isn't going to raise my rent. I can manage Squire, and no mistake about it; but women makes a difference, and she'll be for getting all she can, I count."

"Like you, eh, farmer?"

"Me, Ford? I only tries for what is just. If I have bad crops I can't pay no rent, as it stands to reason; and Squire, he's got plenty without coming down on me. But what's she like? I don't think as I ever set eyes on her, except when she was shut up in the carriage, and I couldn't tell one from the other."

"She's what you might call a reg'lar good 'un to look at, but she ain't no chicken, neither. I suppose Squire was took with her black eyes."

“Do you think as she’s one of the easy-going sort, or one of the screw’em-downs like the old lady?”

“Well, if you ask me what I think of her c’racter I should say as how there was a deal more inside nor ever you’d see outside,” said the blacksmith with a knowing wink. He prided himself on what he believed to be his superior intelligence, and exhibited it in oracular sayings, which his fellow-villagers took for deep wisdom.

“Ah!” grunted the farmer, not quite understanding this remark; “I’d as soon ’a lost a druv o’ pigs as hear this news.”

These two cronies then indulged in various pleasantries on the subject, which accorded better with the foul air of the inn taproom and the fumes of bad beer and stuff called tobacco than with the pages of a book. It was evident from

their conversation that the Squire had succeeded no better in the management of his tenants than of his servants. When his father died he reduced the rents of the three farmers on the little estate, because he felt that he had no right to be living comfortably while these men fought hard for an existence. He had put them in the way of hiring machinery that they might be able to compete with the larger farmers in the neighbourhood; and to convince them that the use of machinery would really be profitable, he had paid for such hire as was needed for one year. But it was difficult to persuade these men to go out of the old groove.

“If Squire liked to send them ’ere machines round again,” they said they would use them; but they had not the enterprise to hire for themselves, and so they found it difficult to keep pace

with "Muster Kemington" and others. Farmer Watkins was especially discontented. He always had a grievance of some sort. His own theory was that "God Almighty was always going dead agen him;" but the opinion of the village generally was that the farmer gave up too much time to his pipe and mug. But as he was one of those who can drink any quantity without seeming the worse for it, he managed to escape the charge of drunkenness. He was a very plausible fellow, and had so completely "got round" the Squire, that for the last two or three years a large percentage on his rent had been regularly remitted "because of misfortunes;" so regularly that he had come to look upon it as a settled thing. Therefore he feared that the Squire's marriage might make some difference to him, for as he stood in awe of his own wife, a thrifty, in-

dustrious soul, who tried to make up for his idleness, he believed in the power of women generally.

At the village shop the subject was cackled over by many female tongues. Directly the wonderment of "how it all happened" was over, the wonderment of what was to be made out of it began. Everything that the old Squire had done on his marriage was recounted. Even some remnants of shawls and garments that were given at the time still remained. They belonged to days when a good woollen shawl was, as these Oakshire women said, "all 'ool, and none o' your cotton mixed up."

Perhaps the most jubilant person in the neighbourhood was Miss Green. She had always persuaded herself that, if Mr. Broderick could be "removed from the baneful influence of his cousin, he would be a very beautiful character indeed;"

which probably meant, in other words, that he would fall an easy prey to the lady herself. Then there were the Miss Bonsors—Miss Sophia, though outwardly on the most friendly footing with them, never could resist a sly thrust at “those girls.” The Miss Bonsors could hardly, and probably did not, lay claim to girlhood any longer, being somewhat about thirty in age; but this was infantine in the eyes of Miss Green, who had reached the period when birthdays do not count.

“Such a disappointment for those poor dear girls,” Miss Green said to everybody. “Of course we always thought he’d choose one of them.”

The gossips, who always settle everything for everybody, had certainly “put down” the Squire for “one of the Bonsor girls,” and Miss Green who never could forgive the young ladies their youth and

good looks, found a malicious pleasure in gloating over the disappointment. Keeley, the coachman, who was looked upon as an authority because he had driven Miss Meadows and Mrs. Carstairs out every day, was not communicative on the subject. He merely answered all inquiries by remarking "she's a well-spoken lady, and the Squire was uncommon fond of little miss."

The amiability and handsome appearance of the lady seemed to be generally acknowledged by those who had seen, or in any way come in contact with her; but no particular interest seemed to be expressed by anyone, except for what they were likely to get out of it. Of course it was not overlooked that "Parson had had a fine time of it, and was likely to find things different now;" for it was no secret in the village that the good things which should have been consumed

at the Hall were generally sent round to the Vicarage, and that the Squire and his cousin invariably dined together.

To say that Broderick himself did not feel it in this light would be scarcely true. He was, as his cousin had reminded him, a sensuous man. He thoroughly enjoyed the good things of this life in whatever shape they came. He could enjoy the colour and scent of a flower, the song of a bird, the invigorating air of a mountain, the cool shade of a tree in summer, or the glow in his veins caused by generous food. But a thousand other thoughts occurred before this one came to him.

He felt that his cousin had, as it were, been wrenched from him by this woman—a woman who he was sure would bring misery into the family. He foresaw all the evils that must happen, and the wretchedness that must come. Then after tormenting himself with such thoughts he

would reproach himself for being prejudiced, and try to imagine that it was all for the best, and that everything would turn out well. He had longed for trouble, or rather had been afraid that he was not doing right in living without trouble, and now it had come with a vengeance. And yet he often said to himself, how ridiculous it was that he should be making trouble out of what was after all a matter for rejoicing. He set himself to his parish work more assiduously than ever, and when the marriage was mentioned to him always spoke joyfully and hopefully.

Still the consumption of tobacco was greater than ever.

He wrote cheery letters to his cousin with all the little items of parish news, and received in return descriptions of the country through which the bride and bridegroom were travelling; but never a word

as to the marriage passed between them after the first letters containing the news and congratulations.

This was the year of the disgrace of Paris, when British holiday-seekers gave a little attention to their own country. Scotland was chosen as the scene of the honeymoon by the newly-married couple, and Thornton at first wrote of returning home in a few weeks. But the weeks went by, and the village looked in vain for all the good things on which they counted, and the parson wondered and smoked.

Could it be that they were so happy in themselves that they forgot everyone else, the parson thought? But no, the tone of Thornton's letters did not show that. What could it be that kept them so long away from home? Surely the lady would rejoice in her newly-found dignity and be anxious to assume it!

The autumn days passed; sorrowfully enough for Broderick, though he tried to persuade himself that he was in a cheerful frame of mind. The leaves fell, and the bare trees showed that winter had set in, but Overton Hall remained deserted, except for its well-fed idle servants. But in time came some signs of returning life. To the great consternation of the butler and housekeeper they received notice to leave.

Jones characterised this as base ingratitude on the part of his mistress, for whom he considered he had "done several good turns." He probably forgot the insolence with which these "good turns" were accompanied. As these autocrats, or rather aristocrats, of the kitchen were above the common herd, they required three months' notice instead of one, and so they were informed that they must make it convenient to leave on a certain day,

and that compensation for the short notice would be given them.

In due course they left, and their successors arrived ; and on one miserable, cold sleety day in December, there was a buzz of preparation in the Hall for the "Squire and his lady," who were expected from Brighton, with "young miss" and the lady's-maid.

CHAPTER X.

“THE family was expected at eight o’clock,” was the message the parson received when he sent round to Overton Hall to inquire at what time they looked for the Squire’s arrival.

“We shall not see him to-day, then,” the parson said to Keziah.

“No, bless his heart,” said the old woman, “but I’ll be bound he’ll be coming over fust thing i’ the morning.” With which conviction the parson retired to bed before ten o’clock, for he had been called out the previous night to Mrs. Tucker, the ditcher’s wife, who

had threatened to die,—a threat she had several times expressed during the last few years, but which she always failed to carry out. So convinced was she, however, on this occasion that “her time had come,” that she insisted on having the parson fetched out of his bed.

The old woman suffered from some mysterious malady which kept her continually in the doctor’s hands, and which also supplied food for gossip for half the old women of Overton. They shook their heads mysteriously over “Mother Tucker’s” complaints, and seemed rather to enjoy talking over the details of them. In fact “Mother Tucker,” by reason of these complaints, had constituted herself quite a heroine in the village, and would probably have resented getting well. The parson,

who visited her regularly, had at first pitied her very much; but although the pity had worn out by reason of being abused, he still felt it was his duty to give in to the weaknesses of a confirmed invalid, and so he had answered several summonses to what she called her death-bed.

On the night before the Squire's arrival he had turned out in the bitter frost, and remained a couple of hours with the old woman, and had then gone from her hot close room into the cold air again. Keziah was very wroth about this, especially towards the evening of the next day when she saw signs of her master having caught cold. She prevailed on him to have a good fire in his bedroom, and put his feet in mustard and hot water, and suggested gruel,

but the parson assured her he should be better without the last item.

"You a-goin' and dangerin' your precious life for that old 'ooman, as she's been hanging by a thread these five years nor more. I never heard of such a thing, and have no patience with her, I haven't," said Keziah, as she saw her master comfortable for the night, with a blazing fire. The old housekeeper was always glad to get to bed early herself, for she was an early riser. It was in vain that her master pointed out how unnecessary it was for her to be "poking about with a candle for a couple of hours before it was light in the winter." She was quite convinced that nothing would go right unless she was up betimes.

By ten o'clock, therefore, on this night, the household were all in bed, and no light was to be seen except in the parson's bedroom, where the fire blazed right gloriously. The parson had found a substitute for gruel in the shape of "something hot," and between this and the mustard-bath, and the pleasant sound of the fire roaring up the wide chimney, and fatigue from loss of sleep the night before, he was soon in a deep and happy slumber.

Presently there was a sound of gravel rattling against his window. Several times was it repeated before he awoke. Then he started up, and forgetful of his cold rushed to the window, threw it up, and called out:

"What's the matter? Mrs. Tucker taken bad again?"

"Bart!" said a well-known voice.

"Good heavens, Thorn! Is it you?
I'll let you in."

He hastily put on his dressing-gown and went down to open the door.

There was a grasping of hands, and then the parson led the way to his room.

"Why, Bart," said the Squire, taking a seat by the fire, "I never thought to find you in bed; it's scarcely half past ten yet, and I made sure you'd expect me."

"Of course I should if you'd been alone, but there's——"

He found it difficult to finish the sentence. It would entail his saying "your wife," or "Mrs. Meadows," and he couldn't make up his mind to either for the first time.

"Yes, of course, but that makes

no difference between us," said the Squire, speaking in an unnatural tone.

"And now I suppose I must congratulate you, Thorn," said the parson, in anything but a congratulatory tone of voice.

"Yes, if you think anyone is to be congratulated who has found out a hell for himself upon earth."

"Good heavens, Thorn! what are you saying? You don't mean to tell me you're not happy?"

"Happy! I've long ceased to have anything to do with happiness."

"Thorn! Thorn, my dear boy! Tell me what has happened! When did you find it out?"

"Find it out! Good God! it doesn't take long to find out whether a human creature is endowed with a soul or not. She's absolutely without soul, Bart! She's stone, adamant,

marble, granite, anything else you can think of that is unimpressible. She'll drive me mad, Bart." He took up the poker, and worked vigorously at the fire with it, as if to relieve his feelings.

"However did it happen, Thorn? What made you marry her? It was such an odd thing for you to do."

"What made me? Why, she did. She positively compelled me to marry her. She twisted me round her finger as if I had been wax. I see it all now; but I didn't see it then. My happiness has gone for ever, Bart, in this world."

"Don't say that, don't say that. We must trust in Providence, Thorn. Perhaps time will soften her."

"Time can't give her a soul, though. I tell you she is absolutely without feeling. She cares only for

money and position; and she sacrificed me to get them. She doesn't care one atom for me. Why, she doesn't even care for that poor child of hers."

"But she may learn to love you, Thorn. No one can help loving you who really knows you."

"She is incapable of love. She has gained all she wanted. At least she has money and position. No doubt she would have liked a husband with whom she could play a sort of cat-and-mouse game—a fool who would be ready to gratify her slightest whim, and keep out of her way when he wasn't wanted. But I can't play that part. I want real downright love in return for love, and that I've never had from anyone but you, old boy."

"And that you can always count on from me, Thorn."

"I believe that poor child cares a little bit for me. You should only have seen her face when I went to fetch her from school yesterday. The little thing positively cried for joy. I thought she would have forgotten me, but she was so delighted that she couldn't speak. I'll never let her go back. Poor child! She shall find a father in me, if she can get no love from her mother."

"But surely, Thorn, she must love her own child; instinct would teach her to do that."

"I tell you, Bart, she has not even the ordinary maternal instinct of which most animals are possessed. She is a lump of ice in the shape of a woman."

"Don't you think you are out of health, Thorn, and that you exaggerate the state of things?"

"Of course I am out of health, when I have had to keep back every natural

feeling ; and have had to gradually find out day after day that I am tied to a woman without a soul. Oh, Bart ! you don't know what I've suffered."

"Why didn't you come home before and tell me about it? It would have relieved you just to talk it over."

"She kept me with all sorts of excuses, and at last I began to dread coming back. I felt I should hate to look people in the face. Sometimes I've been tempted to leave her and go abroad——"

"But you'll not forget your duty to her, old boy, will you?"

"No, that's it, confound it! Duty is always staring me in the face. But it's very hard when duty must take the place of love. I had enough of that sort of thing in my youth. The poor dear pater was none too affectionate, and as for my aunt and the girls, they certainly don't inspire one to high feeling of any sort.

No, Bart. 'There is nothing for me now but duty.'

He began pacing up and down the room.

"God help you, Thorn! you must look to Him for help."

"What a fool I was to put an end to our happy life, Bart! I can't think why I was so weak-minded. If you had done such a thing I shouldn't have been astonished; because you know, old boy, you were always frightened of women. But fancy me doing it! What a weak fool I was!"

"You must try to think it was intended for the best. You know we were—"

"Never, never, Bart. I'll never believe that theory of you Christians that God purposely brings trouble on us. He makes us reasonable creatures, and if we fall into mistakes we must take the consequences. I was a fool, I tell you—a

weak-minded fool—and now I must pay for my folly.”

“Still you can ask for help to bear the consequences of your folly. You are very clever I know, Thorn; but the cleverest of men need not despise the words of the Psalmist, ‘lean not to thine own understanding.’ ”

“Yes, you dear old boy, you’re right enough there. No amount of human understanding seems to be enough to prevent most of us from making a hash of our lives. But in such a trouble as this one feels God-forsaken altogether.”

“No, no, Thorn! never that. We must still look to Him, and believe that all is for the best. Sit down and quiet yourself! you are excited and worried. Shall we have a smoke? I’ve some cigarettes up here which have consoled me occasionally when I couldn’t sleep.”

"I suppose there's been a large consumption of tobacco lately, eh, Bart?"

"Well, I'm afraid it's been much larger than usual."

"I thought as much. For my part I never smoked so much in my life. She objected at first, and I like a fool gave in. But she soon wore out my courtesy. I have to be continually thwarting her. I feel just like a savage. It's so wretchedly barbaric to be always at war with your own people. And yet one can't tamely submit to be trodden on."

"It will be your duty, Thorn, to hold authority as the—the—"

The parson found the word "husband" a most uncomfortable one to apply to his cousin under the circumstances. It was so difficult to realize the position.

"Yes, of course, I must do that; but the thought need never occur where there is any real feeling. I've had another of

those vulgar things called 'rows' to-day ; and you'd never believe, Bart, what an advantage she has over me. She is perfectly calm and collected, and says what she has to say in the most cold-blooded way ; while I am suffering intensely all the time. If she'd only show a little feeling—anger even—I could forgive her. She must be a born actress, for she pretended to enough feeling before we married."

"I can understand how it must irritate you. I pray God she may alter."

"I can only pray God to take all feeling from me."

"Thorn, Thorn, my dear boy, don't say such dreadful things. We must make the best of it. There is the child to love, as you say."

"Yes, that's what the fuss was about to-day. I said I should remove her from school, and have her educated

at home ; in fact I mean to adopt her."

"Aren't you afraid of the mother's blood coming out in time?"

"No, she's totally unlike her in every way. I can't understand it. No two creatures could be more unlike. Before our marriage she was—or appeared to be—extravagant in her affection for the child ; she seemed never tired of fondling it, and was heartbroken at parting with it ; and really, much as I took to the little thing myself, I thought her rather ungrateful to her mother, for she never seemed to return her love at all. Of course I see it all now—it was so much acting ; all to impress me. How cunning these cold-hearted people are ! They don't know what it is to feel themselves, and yet they know how to work upon a warm heart."

Neither the Squire nor his cousin seemed inclined to mention Mrs. Meadows

in any other way than by the personal pronoun ; so that to a listener the conversation might at times have appeared involved.

“ Yet we may still ask God to keep our hearts warm ;” said the parson, “ and we must be pitiful to those who cannot feel. They lose so much real happiness. I’m glad you like the little girl.”

“ I’ll tell you what my scheme for her is, Bart. You know when she first came here she had been at some wretched school where they profess to educate and take care of them generally for some ridiculous sum : twenty or thirty pounds a year—something of that sort. In the hurry of our marriage we hadn’t time to think what was to be done, so she was sent to another school in Brighton that her mother mentioned—a very expensive one—and there she was to remain according to her mother’s wishes. But the

little thing was so glad to see me yesterday, and seemed so glad when I asked her how she'd like to stay at home altogether, that I made up my mind on the subject last night. I propose to adopt her, and educate her myself—"

"Good gracious, Thorn, however will you manage to educate a girl?"

"You'll see, old boy; it will just fill up my time and keep me from going mad. I propose to teach her certain subjects, and I want to ask you to be her master for certain others, don't you see? Just the same, you know, as if you'd taken pupils, as you talked of, only less worry because you won't have her in the house. Two hundred a year, suppose we say, Bart, though you know I should be only too glad if you'd accept double or treble that sum: only you're so frightened to take a penny from your own cousin, who has a right to offer it."

“I’m sure that’s a great deal too much for anything I can do for the child. Whatever could I teach that a little girl wants to know? How Quixotic you are! I believe you are doing it for my sake.”

“Not at all. I really like the child, and I think between us we might manage to educate her very well. I’ll take English literature and—”

“Philosophy, eh?”

“None of your chaff, Bart. You can take Greek and Latin and Theology. If you can teach her to be as good a Christian as yourself, old boy, you’ll have more than earned your money. I wish there were more like you.”

“I’m sure I’m quite ready to join in any of your schemes, Thorn, but I hope you’ve weighed it all well. You know the consequences of acting on impulse.”

“Yes; don’t revert to that. As to

weighing it well, I can't say I have. I'm too mad to weigh anything. I must do the best I can for present relief; and I don't think I'm taking a very foolish step in educating a child over whom I have legal rights. She can but turn out ungrateful, and I'm tolerably certain she won't."

"Won't you have a governess of any sort?"

"I'm not inclined to. I begin to be frightened of governesses and useful companions and women of that sort. I don't see what a woman is wanted for, unless to teach her to strum on the piano, and that doesn't seem to me a very desirable accomplishment. Besides, if she has any musical talent that is worth cultivation, I'll manage somehow to get a master for her. I should like her to learn the violin if she really cares for music."

“Well, Thorn, I hope you may be right in this. I had begun to think seriously of advertising for pupils since your—since you went away; but if you really wish me to teach this little girl I am ready to do what I can in my poor way; only you must pay me as you would a stranger.”

“That’s exactly what I’m offering to do. You don’t suppose that I’m going to take up your valuable time for nothing. Besides, as I before remarked, you’re beyond all value.”

“That’s only your partiality. I’m afraid I should have made but a sorry figure in the world without your help. I should probably at this time have been only a curate with fifty pounds a year.”

“Nonsense! don’t undervalue yourself. You’ve a right to some of the family property, and I’ve taken good

care that in case anything happens to me you are well provided for. And you might let me give in my life what you would take at my death."

"If I accept what you choose to call a salary for teaching the little maid, I shall be quite rich, Thorn; rich enough to keep a wife if I wanted one."

"Ah, my boy! don't you be in a hurry to get one though. Good heavens! what a terrible warning it is! Look here, Bart, if you make a mistake of that sort it will be your own fault. You have me for an example, so there's no excuse for you. Do you know I'm always blaming my aunt for my mistake. I suppose it's the nature of a human animal to lay the blame on some one else, just as Adam did on Eve. By Jove! that story of Adam and Eve, whether it's true or not, is about as perfect a bit of human nature as ever

was written. What tempters the women are ! and what weak fools the men ! My aunt got me into a regular fix. It never would have happened but for her. If she had never accused me of dishonourable motives I should never have had a second thought of the woman beyond how I could be of service to her."

"Will—er—she be waiting for you to-night? Won't she think it unkind for you to leave her on the first evening and come over here?"

"Unkind ! Not she ! I should have some hope of her if she could feel unkindness. She would like to have me waiting on her merely to show me off as a victim. I was blind enough to marry her, but I'm not weak enough to be her tool day after day. We each go our own way. The best bedroom has been prepared for her, and I keep to my old bachelor room."

"You don't mean to say, Thorn, that you occupy separate apartments already?"

"You don't suppose that I can tolerate being shut up in a room alone for hours together with a person I hate?"

"Hush, hush! don't say hate. It's so terrible to hate anyone."

"I know it's terrible, Bart, and I don't believe anyone ever realised the terribleness more than I do. I was not fond of my aunt, but I never realised what it was to *hate* before."

"What talk and gossip there'll be about it."

"Of course it will be a nine days' wonder, and Miss Green will gloat over it, and will probably take to my—to her to annoy me, and everyone will have something to say; and then the subject will drop when something else turns up."

"It's very sad," said the parson, shaking his head and staring at the glowing red fire as he puffed at his cigarette. "I had hoped it was all so different."

"Bart, old boy," said the Squire, rising and laying his hand on the parson's shoulder, "I've an ugly life in front of me, and I shall trust to you to help me bear it."

"Yes," said the parson, getting up to let his cousin out, "but we must trust in God to help us."

The friends gave a grasp of assurance to each other; and it was not till the parson had let Thornton out and returned to his own room and was shivering violently, that he remembered his cold. Excitement had kept it entirely out of his mind, and had in fact temporarily stopped it.

The newly-married Squire walked home

through the snow, and was let into the hall by the new butler, who informed him that his mistress had retired for the night. He went straight up to his old room, which was just as he had left it nearly four months ago. No change in the room, but what a change in the occupant!

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. THORNTON MEADOWS seemed very well satisfied with her position as mistress of Overton Hall. The general routine of the house was sufficiently familiar for her to fall easily into it; for Miss Arabella had, during her six weeks' visit put as many of her duties as she possibly could on her companion.

She commanded the servants as if to the manner born, at least she fancied she did; but a close observer might have noticed that she overdid it a little; there was just that touch of aggressiveness which one who has served often

adopts towards those who serve. Still, it was an excellent imitation of the real thing.

The new housekeeper, Mrs. Watson, and the butler, Evans, were obsequious enough, having been engaged by the mistress herself. The underservants did not quite agree with Mrs. Watson's rule, and some changes were made. But the household generally soon settled down to the new order of things—all but the master of it. He, unfortunately, was not one of those lucky people who can live without love and without hate, as so many thousands can. The presence of anyone he did not like—with whom he had no sympathy—always irritated him exceedingly, even were it only that of a servant. In his anxiety to keep out of his wife's presence as much as possible he allowed her to usurp too much authority, and

there seemed some likelihood of his becoming a nullity in the house.

When he prophesied that Miss Green would "take to" his wife to spite him, he hardly calculated how quickly would come the fulfilment. Miss Green dearly loved a bit of scandal. When it was whispered abroad that the newly-married couple occupied different apartments, Miss Green was as happy as a vulture who sniffs a carcase near. She had pined of late for her favourite food. The four months absence of the Squire had made the talk on his marriage become stale, and he himself being a usual subject for comment was much missed.

Captain Dallas, who lived at Overton Cottage, was always stock-in-trade for gossips. Overton Cottage, or The Cottage, as it was generally called, was built as a dower-house in the early part of the century

for one of the ladies of Overton Hall who required a separate establishment from her eldest son. It had seldom, since that time, been used by the family; in fact, the squires had for the last two generations outlived their wives. It was a very moderate-sized house, built at the end of the village, and enclosed in a couple of acres of ground by a high wall—the very dearest of dead walls as to outside appearance, but well covered inside with fruit trees in the kitchen-garden and creepers in the flower-garden. It was always let furnished, and never for a long term, in case any necessity should arise for its use by a dowager lady of Overton or any other member of the family. Under these circumstances it often remained unlet for long periods, and the tenants changed frequently, and were sometimes of very eccentric character.

Middle-class folk who want a house of moderate size generally prefer a spic-and-span villa, where there is an opportunity of showing off a wealth of window-curtain and antimacassar. They don't care to hide themselves within four walls. So it came to pass that the tenants of the cottage were generally odd people, who supplied Miss Green with a good deal of that pabulum which was to her what a sea-breeze is to a healthy person.

Sometimes an artist would come for a few months for the sake of the scenery. On one occasion a novelist had come for rest and quiet; on another an overworked doctor had come for three months. All these gave Miss Green something to talk about. It was so exciting to find out their histories and failings. Sometimes the Squire made friends with his quon-

dam tenants, and sometimes took no notice of them.

The present tenant, Captain Dallas, had now occupied the cottage for nearly two years. He was a Scotchman, and had been formerly in the Navy. Miss Green had taken great pains to gather statistics as to how much whiskey he drank, how much tobacco he smoked, what was his income, how much he allowed his wife, and what was the state of his wife's wardrobe. The first item was settled by the lady at a very high figure, and the last must have been in a low state, as Miss Green veraciously informed everybody that "Mrs. Dallas, poor thing, could not go to church because she'd not had a new bonnet for five years."

But Miss Green could tell you a great deal more than this about Captain and Mrs. Dallas if you had any desire to

listen. However, even the Captain had become stale and unprofitable of late.

There is a general stagnation in the atmosphere from about the middle of November to the middle of December. There was even a stagnation in gossip in the neighbourhood of Overton, in the year of which I am writing. So the scandal about the Squire and his wife was quite a godsend, or rather a devil-send. Miss Green gloated over it. She took the very earliest opportunity of calling at the Hall; in fact she was the first caller after the bride's return.

The Squire had very decidedly refused to join in any arrangement for a "state reception-day," and Mrs. Meadows was too wise to attempt anything of the sort by herself. So she excused herself on the ground of having been so long

married, and of Christmas festivities interfering. Miss Green soon heard of all this from the parson, and went the same day to make a ceremonious call. Mrs. Meadows was only too delighted to see her, for she was half afraid that in consequence of her former position in the house she might perhaps not be noticed.

Miss Arabella and Miss Green had been great friends; that is they talked gushingly to one another when they were together, and abused each other roundly when they were apart. But Mrs. Meadows did not care what the lady's character was; her family held a position in the county, and that was enough.

Great civilities passed between the ladies on this first visit; but Miss Green, who thought herself an adept in the art of extracting a person's history,

might as well have pumped at a dry well for water as attempt to make Mrs. Meadows say what she had no intention of saying. She had found her match. The Squire's wife had made up her mind to learn all she could, and tell as little as possible, and she succeeded.

But Miss Green was not going to be baffled. She managed to come on various excuses connected with the parish, and about subscriptions for the charities that were collected at Christmas time. The "mothers' meeting" was especially under Miss Green's management, there being no lady at the Vicarage, and the soup-kitchen she also undertook, with some other little matters.

"You know, my dear Mrs. Meadows," she said on one of her visits, "you are quite a godsend to the parish—really a godsend. I shall count on you—may I not,

my dear?—to co-operate with me. As I've so often said to Mr. Broderick, the work is almost more than I can do by myself, and I told him—I really did, you know—that he ought to marry, so that his wife could help in the parish. You see with no lady either at the Hall or Vicarage, everything devolves upon me—everything.

“I'm sure I shall be very happy to assist you,” said Mrs. Meadows in her dove-like way.

“That is so nice of you now—so very nice,” laying her hands on the cold marble hands of Mrs. Meadows. “I really never counted on so fortunate a circumstance as Mr. Meadows marrying. I never did, you know, so that I am doubly pleased.”

“Was he not liked then?” asked Mrs. Meadows.

“Well, my dear, I cannot be so un-

complimentary to his wife as to say he was not, but he was considered eccentric—just a little eccentric, you know, as I daresay you find him, do you not?”

“I do not object to eccentricity.”

“Don’t you really, now? Well, I don’t mind a little of it myself, just a little; but you know Mr. Meadows really grieves us all very much because he does not attend church, or in fact any place of worship. If you could use your influence now—for of course no one has such influence as a wife—if you could only persuade him to attend church it would be such an excellent thing for the neighbourhood—such an example, you know.”

“I leave that to Mr. Broderick. I should never think of interfering with anyone’s religion, even my husband’s.”

“ Ah, Mrs. Meadows, you take that bad boy’s part, and quite natural too. The relation that exists between husband and wife is so intimate—so sacred I may say—that it altogether transcends what we single women can understand. You are quite right to let love blind you to any little imperfections. And after all, with all his faults he is a very lovable man—so kind—so affectionate to all around him. He even spoils his servants; and it’s proverbial all round the neighbourhood that the servants at the Hall are overpaid and overfed. It makes it very inconvenient for other households, you know, that practise a stricter economy.”

“ Yes, I think there’s room for reform in that respect.”

“ And how fond he is of that dear child of yours, now, isn’t he?”

“ Yes, he has adopted my daughter.”

“How old did you say she was?”

“Nine and a half.”

“Dear me what a very fine girl for her age, very fine indeed. And I hope, dear Mrs. Meadows, if I may touch on so delicate a subject—so sweet and delicate a subject—that you will soon present us with an heir. Now don’t deny it, you may trust me with your confidence. I can see by your blushes that it is so. Father and son, have the Meadows’ gone on since the days of Sir Robert, who was in Charles’s time, you know, though I really forget which Charles, whether the blessed martyr or that very naughty man, you know; and never a break has there been, though sometimes it has been the younger son, as in the case of your husband; but never a break, my dear friend Arabella told me, and we shall expect you to do your duty, you know.”

“I don’t care for children.”

“Oh, fie! fie! Mrs. Meadows; married women should never say that. But really, now, I hope it will be a boy because, as my friend Arabella used to say, it would be such a pity for the line to break; in fact, she prophesied ill-luck to Overton Hall if ever the succession should go out of the elder branch of the family. But if it should be a girl, why, my dear, you know we can hope for a boy next time.”

“Pet!” shouted out the Squire at this moment, putting his head inside the door of the morning-room where the ladies sat. “Are you there, Pet?”

“Here she is,” said Miss Green, getting up, “don’t let me be in the way, I’d only come in on a little parish business. You see I’m so thankful to make use of your dear wife. It was really quite kind of you, Mr. Meadows, to bring such an

efficient help into the parish. I am sure we ought to be grateful to you."

The Squire had at first felt inclined to run away on seeing the two women whom in all the world he most disliked; but his sense of courtesy prevented him, and he went forward to shake hands with Miss Green, and receive the above-recorded speech.

"I was looking for my daughter," he said rather sternly.

"Oh! she's happily engaged romping with your collie; I saw her a few minutes ago pass the window there. I wonder how she can bear the cold, running about with nothing on her head. Did you hear the wind last night?"

"I don't hear it much in my room, because I'm wedged in between the north and the west wing, and the wind was east, but I expected to see some of the trees

blown down this morning. If you'll excuse me I'll say 'good morning,' as I was just going round to see Broderick on a little business;" and the Squire left the room.

"Oh, dear me!" said Miss Green, lifting up her hands and trying very hard to bring a blush to cheeks that had never known what a good honest blush is; "oh, dear! I hope he didn't hear our conversation; so very awkward, isn't it? I hardly knew how to look him in the face, in case he heard."

"I don't think you need fear. My husband is always so wrapt up in his books and studies that he scarcely notices anything that goes on around him. He is very absent-minded sometimes."

"You must break him of that, you know. It's all very well for a bachelor; but a married man has something to think

about. Poor dear Mr. Meadows ! We've so often said he needed somebody to look after him. His father nearly killed himself with anxiety about him ; and his aunt —well I'm sure my dear friend Arabella has had many a sleepless night about him ; and I heard she was rather opposed to your marriage ; but I'm sure, my dear, I said at the time, and I say now, she ought to go down on her knees and thank God he has fallen into such good hands. Yes, my dear, I really mean it ; I'm not flattering you."

"It is very nice of you to say so," said Mrs. Meadows, seeing through the flattery, but anxious to be friendly with Miss Green, because she knew her influence in the place. "Of course my husband is not like other men, as anyone can easily see ; but it is the duty of a wife to give in to her husband's peculiarities. He dislikes ceremony of all kinds, and looks

annoyed when I mention dinner parties ; but, of course, my dear Miss Green, we must be social, must we not ?”

“ Most certainly. You are right there, Mrs. Meadows ; and it will be your duty to keep your husband in mind of his social position in the county. He has failed very much in that respect—most lamentably, I can assure you.”

“ Of course my position is a little awkward at first. I have known affluence ; but through misfortune I was reduced to great poverty, and obliged to accept the post in which you first saw me. The little income that remained to me out of the wreck of my first husband’s fortune, I devoted to the education of my child—”

“ And most estimable of you.”

“ I felt that I would suffer anything to give her a good education, and I am

happy now in the knowledge that I did my duty."

"Of course you are."

"The position I now occupy is no better than I had once a right to look for; for I was well-born and bred. By the faults of others I was forced into poverty and dependence; and if, for that reason, people do not care to call on me, they may keep away."

This conversation resulted in a sort of "swearing eternal friendship" between the two ladies. They were utterly unlike in character, for Miss Green was full of small and petty vices. She was not strong enough in mind to perpetrate any great wickedness; she could only irritate all round, and sting here and there like a wasp. But Mrs. Meadows had, as the village blacksmith truly remarked, "a great deal more inside her nor ever you'd see ouside." She never condescended to

gossip, or to mean and petty ways : she was to most people a ladylike, pleasant, and generous woman ; a trifle too silent for sociability, and perhaps a little too haughty in manner ; but on the whole, there seemed nothing to find fault with in her. That is, to the world in general.

But whatever good qualities she appeared to have, she had wrecked the life of at least one man.

Thornton Meadows sometimes wondered whether there had been any other victims besides himself. He had of late begun to think that her first husband had cause for his severe behaviour. Nothing will excuse a man for striking a woman—and he had evidently been in the habit of striking her—but Thornton could understand the intense irritation that any man of strong feeling must suffer with her. With all her suavity and generosity, with her handsome face and sweet manners, she was a

hated wife. The knowledge of this perhaps made her more haughty than was natural; gave her a sense of being injured and a determination to assert herself, and gave her also the friendship of Miss Green.

That lady's lynx eyes soon found out the actual state of affairs, though Mrs. Meadows tried very hard to keep up an appearance of friendliness between herself and her husband. The office of consoling a hated wife, especially when Thornton Meadows was the husband, was to Miss Green a particularly pleasing one. She went about with an air of importance in the neighbourhood as knowing all about the "very unfortunate state of affairs" between the Squire and his wife; and when later on the women folk were curious as to whether any "family" was expected at the Hall, Miss Green would shake her head solemnly, and

whisper a few mysterious words which would cause the ladies either to giggle or look shocked, according to their respective characters.

Miss Green generally spoke of her "great friend," as she called her, as a "poor dear thing," and Thornton Meadows as "that horrid brute;" but it is probable that the "poor dear thing" would hardly have thanked her champion for this, for underneath all the humility which Mrs. Meadows could pretend to on occasions, a fierce pride blazed—a pride that was perhaps at the bottom of all her sins.

Pride made her try to conquer everyone who came in her way—that is, everyone who was worth conquering. But her pride was wounded when she found that her husband was unconquerable. She had conquered him so far as to make him marry her, and give her the position she

coveted ; but the man himself was unconquerable. It would require love to conquer him, and she had no love in her ; pride left no room for it ; so she had to patch up her wounds as best she might, and make the most of the situation.

CHAPTER XII.

“**H**OW snug this is, Liz,” said Keeley the coachman to his wife, one cold March evening as he sat down by a blazing fire to a savoury-smelling supper of boiled pork and onions, with a large dish of floury potatoes. He had driven his mistress and Miss Green, her constant companion, to a county town some ten miles off, where they had a large amount of shopping to do; and had brought them back again just in the dusk, when the cold is most intense. Moreover he was facing the east wind all the way back, and inured as he was to all weathers, he had

felt it more than usual. The ladies inside the carriage were warm enough with furs and foot-warmer; but Keeley's face had the skin pretty well taken off.

Keeley always counted his supper as his chief meal, because, as he said, he had done his work, and could eat it with a quiet conscience.

On this night his meal was particularly welcome to him, for he had got thoroughly chilled with the long drive against the wind, and the fire and food were warming him. The chimney-shelf and the walls of the lodge kitchen were bright with saucepan lids and various utensils in tin and pewter, which were polished till you could see your face in them, and reflected the light of the lamp all round.

"And isn't it always snug, Bob?" said Mrs. Keeley, in answer to her husband's remark.

"Of course it is, Liz; but I catch'd a

chill this evening coming along in the teeth of that wind, and got a bit low, and now I'm warmed up, and am thinking what a comfortable sort of lass you are, my gal, don't you see? I don't believe there's another like you, Liz!"

"Glad you think so, Bob; but you know I only make you comfortable with your own money; it's every bit yourn."

"Ah, but there's two ways of spending it, and you know the right 'un; and as to saying it's mine, why, it's yourn as well, 'cos what's mine's yourn."

"Well, I'm sure I'm very comfortable, Bob."

"I'm glad to hear it, my gal. I wish others was as happy as us. Poor Squire looks very down i' the mouth."

"Does he? poor dear!"

"And *she* seems happy enough a-spending of his money, and a-going about with

that Miss Green. I can't abide Miss Green, Liz."

"Nor can I, Bob. When she comes in here to ask if they're in she's spying about all the time, trying to find out what I have got in the pot for dinner maybe, or asking questions about you or the children, or worrying me to join her mother's meetins or something of that sort, as if I was going to be beholden to her for any of her charities, when I've got good money to spend, and no want of nothing. And it strikes me there's a deal more gossip nor anything else at they meetins, and the clothes no cheaper nor I can make them at home."

"Yes, she's a rare one at gossip she is, she'd take away your character afore you knew where you was. I always whips up well out of the way of such like, and keeps on the off side, and don't have nothing to say to them. But she and

mistress is as thick as thieves, and I know Squire can't abide her no more than me, nor his lady either for that matter."

"Oh, Bob! you wouldn't go so far as to say he don't like his wife, though they don't get on together."

"But I would, Liz! I'm sure Squire's the most miserable man in the county. I'll tell you what it is, Liz; I believe he took to the little gal because it was lonesome like up at the Hall, and he was obliged to take to the mother as well. There! I've thought and thought about it, and can't make it out nohow. He ain't the same man, Squire ain't. If you believe me, Liz, I think he'd rather sit down here and have some of this 'ere pork and onions with us, than sit at his own dinner-table with his lady. Ah! if he'd only had a wife like you, Liz!"

"Like me? Why, what 'ud be the good of the likes o' me in that big house,

and drivin' about in a carriage? I should want to come on the box with you."

"I didn't mean that, Liz. Hearts is hearts whether they belong to gentle-folks or common-folks, and I mean some one with a good heart, like you, my gal; and never was there a better."

"I see, Bob. Poor dear! and he so kind to everyone, and so ready to help any of us in trouble, an' ne'er a soul to take care of him."

"Yes, he's always thinking o' somebody. He'd never 'a let me and the cattle turn out such a day as this for his own pleasure, not he!"

"No, he thinks o' the animals, as well as everything else. He do seem uncommon fond of the little girl, Bob, don't he?"

"Yes; they tell me that he and Parson is teaching her book-learning, and mighty clever she'll be, I should say, considerin' Squire and Parson are counted

the cleverest men in this part of the country. And they say Squire's always at his books, and that he sits up half the night reading."

"And no wonder, too, when he's worried in his mind. I hope it won't kill him, poor dear!"

"I hope not. It 'ud be a bad day for us as well as him, if Squire's took. I don't know how it 'ud be, whether she'd live here or not, but she ain't too fond of me as I can see, and all 'cos Squire speaks favourable of me."

"But you must be civil to her, Bob, because we've the children to think of."

"I'll be civil to her, 'cos she's the Squire's lawful lady, Liz, and I must pay respect to anyone as belongs to him; but I declare to you that sometimes, as I'm a-driving along with her behind me, I feel that wicked in my heart—"

"Oh, Bob!"

“I do, Liz; an’ I can’t help it. If ever anyone sends the devil into me, she does. She looks so good, an’ smilin’, and pleasant, and gives away such a lot of things, and all with Squire’s money, and she’s a-breakin’ his heart all the time, that she is. I tell you, Liz, I often wish her dead.”

“Oh, Bob! you’ll be a-going and up-setting the carriage some day when you’re a-thinking like that, and you’ll get killed, and what will me and the children do?”

“Nonsense, Liz! The horses know me too well, they ain’t going to upset me; but ’pon my word if I don’t think they cattle know her too, for they goes along very different when Squire’s behind. And Laddie can’t abide her. He slinks away with his tail between his legs.”

“Oh, Bob! when I think of it all I says to myself, what a blessed thing it is that we don’t hate one another.”

"Yes, we'll thank the Lord for it, Liz."

"But you'll be civil to *her*, won't you, Bob?"

"I'll do my best for Squire's sake."

CHAPTER XIII.

IT has been noticed many times that a disappointment in love will often drive men to fix their minds on some impersonal object. How many great works in poetry, painting, and music do we not owe to such disappointments! The energy of a great mind must find vent somewhere. Even a small mind like Miss Sophia Green's requires excitement of some sort. But Miss Green was now thoroughly employed. She had taken Mrs. Thornton Meadows in hand, and was the great authority in the neighbourhood on affairs at Overton Hall.

And it so happened that affairs at Overton Hall were of particular interest to those families who lived upon gossip. When a husband and wife who occupy a conspicuous position are at variance, there are always plenty of amused lookers-on. Not that the Squire and his wife ever quarrelled openly. The ordinary civilities of life passed between them, and that was all. So far as the lady was concerned it would have been difficult to discover that anything was the matter, for she always wore the same placid amiable smile, and neither love nor hate was expressed on her face.

But Thornton Meadows was thoroughly in earnest in everything he did, and he could not shape his face to deceit. He felt his hatred of the woman growing on him, and though he tried hard to fight against it he could not overcome it. The

very rustle of her dress annoyed him as she came into the room with that eternal smile upon her face. As he sat at table with her he felt that he hardly knew what he was eating, or saying, or doing ; in fact, as he told Bart when pouring out his troubles, it seemed as if some demon got possession of him.

“Bart,” he said one night as he sat in the parson’s wainscotted parlour, “I cannot bear it much longer. I’m afraid I shall break out some day and say something savage. It’s better to go away and leave her than do that. She can stay here if she likes.”

“I’m ashamed of you, Thorn,” said the parson, “not bearing trouble better. Where’s your philosophy? Remember there are some who have the same trouble as you, with poverty added to it. Think of that ! You don’t know what poverty means. You have everything in the

world to make you happy, except just that one trouble."

"And that one trouble makes life not worth having."

"Nonsense! it was sent as a lesson to teach you that life is not all ease and comfort and happiness. Fix your mind on some particular study, Thorn. Take up some subject, and you'll be astonished how much it will relieve you. Look how much has been done by men who have been crossed in love or suffered from some cruel disappointment."

"Crossed in love! But you see I wasn't crossed in love. If I had been I might settle down better. What I feel is that I must go on day after day, week after week, year after year, bearing the presence of this cursed woman——"

"Hush, hush! You must try to think of her more kindly."

"I tell you I cannot, Bart; it is all so hopeless. I cannot fix my mind as you say on any subject. I want a human heart, not a dry study."

"There's the child, Thorn."

"Yes, poor little Pet! of course I couldn't stay in the place but for her. But when I've brought her up I suppose she'll soon be married and leave me. Do you know sometimes I think that woman will poison her. She's capable of anything."

"I'm sure you exaggerate things in your mind, Thorn. Trouble often has the effect of unbalancing one's mind."

"My mind will pretty soon be off the balance altogether if I cannot get away from that woman."

"Don't you think, Thorn, if you were to put it seriously to her that you cannot live with her, and that you are ready to

make a handsome allowance, she would go?"

"My dear fellow I've told her she can have her settlements, which were handsome enough, and go at any time, but she refuses. I tell you she's happy enough, she's got all she wanted, and she doesn't allow my misery to worry her for a moment."

"I think, Thorn, you are not right in letting her so completely crush you. It's not manly of you. You're no longer master in your own house, and all because you're too lazy to rouse yourself. You are accustomed to taking things easily, and directly trouble comes you break down."

"I could bear any other trouble, Bart; you don't realise what this is to me."

"I think I do, my dear boy. God knows how it fills my thoughts night and

day. And on Sunday in church she takes up my attention when I should be thinking of other things. I wish the pew were not so near me. And you don't know, Thorn, what a shudder passes through me when I administer the Sacrament to her. You can't understand that because you don't believe in it. But I do pray most earnestly her heart may be softened."

"But she hasn't a heart. You can't get a spark of humanity out of her."

"And yet see how she is liked by people generally."

"That is quite accounted for by her liberality. She is pauperizing the place."

"That is just one of the points where you ought to interfere. I have already come across several instances where she is doing more harm than good."

"Yes; did you notice old Tucker the ditcher last Sunday?"

"No; he doesn't often trouble the church."

"He evidently had some reason for it on this occasion. He was in a brand new suit of broadcloth instead of his picturesque smock. I don't suppose he ever got into a coat before in his life. He looked wretchedly uncomfortable; but he evidently thought it was his duty to show himself, for he stood at the church gates till she came out. I suppose she fancies she's done that man a service to put him into broadcloth after he has worn a smock for more than sixty years of his life. I remember young Arnold making a sketch of him; he's a picturesque old beggar."

"And a tiresome fellow."

"So Miss Green says. He's like me—can't be got to church, eh, Bart. Though I think I've beaten old Tucker in my attendance lately, haven't I?"

“Yes, but I wish you’d sit in your own pew instead of going to the free seats. People do talk so much.”

“But, my dear boy, your Master never taught that we are to be divided into high and low in our worship of Him.”

“There you are with your odd ideas, Thorn! You always want to go to the root of things.”

“And isn’t that right?”

“No, because it would reduce everyone to the same level, and we know that there always must be distinctions amongst men and women. You are the Squire here, and are looked up to as——”

“Yes, I know, old boy; and I ought to lead a highly respectable life, to go to church every Sunday, to look round benignly on my dependants and inferiors, to thank God that I am not as they,

and finally to pretend I like that hateful woman, while all the time I had my eye on some wench in a sly corner. I should then be regarded as a truly respectable member of society, shouldn't I?"

Such conversations very frequently took place in the comfortable Vicarage parlour at night between the cousins. In the old days the parson seemed to be the weaker man, and depended on the Squire for advice, but now their positions were changed.

Thornton Meadows was an altered man. He had been trying for months to shut himself up from his trouble, to turn himself away from it, to get rid of it in any way rather than face it. He was always planning schemes in his own mind whereby he and the parson and the child could get away from the place that had become hateful to him;

but he saw how impracticable they were. He had so far attached himself to the child that now he could not part with her; and he knew that if any arrangement could be arrived at whereby his wife would leave him she would take the child out of mere spite. For although she made some show of affection before other people, she allowed her husband to see by her actions that she positively hated her little daughter. It was this unnatural behaviour on her part which led Thornton Meadows to believe that she was absolutely without feelings.

It was now that he began more than ever to appreciate the softness and goodness of his cousin's character. The Vicarage parlour became a place of refuge for him. He used to bring over his little stepdaughter, or go by himself in the evening when she was in bed, and look to

the parson for sympathy. Broderick longed to give him all the comfort he could, but felt at the same time that he ought to use his influence to make him face his trouble in the right way. The cause of all this misery was herself happy enough. She had not, perhaps, gained all she wanted, but she managed to make the best of what she had.

When she became acquainted with Miss Green, she had fully intended to make a tool of that lady, and not be used as a tool by her. But in this she did not quite succeed. Miss Green enjoyed her position as confidential friend of an injured wife. Mrs. Thornton Meadows would rather not be known as an injured wife; still, Miss Green was too useful as a friend, and too powerful as an enemy, to be cast on one side, so the Squire's wife accepted the position and made the most of it. When ladies looked pityingly on her, and hinted

at her husband's shortcomings, she put on her prettiest manner, and, while pretending to be resigned, insinuated dark things; so that it began to be whispered about that the Squire of Overton was "a little cracked;" and people touched their foreheads as they informed one another of this fact.

There are men-gossips and women-gossips, but women have undoubtedly the pull over the men. The vices of one sex sit uneasily on the other. A drunken woman is said to be one of the worst sights in humanity; and a gossiping man might be said to be one of the most contemptible of human creatures.

Miss Royds, who kept the general shop in the village, took the part of the Squire's wife, because she received orders for many of that lady's charities to the poor. Moreover, the Squire had some mad scheme in his head by which he wanted to apply the

principles of co-operation to the village, and not only procure everything at cheap cost, but save the poor people from depending on credit. This did not please Miss Royds at all. She had for the last thirty years sold her goods at the highest price, and given long credit. She could not understand that the benefit of the whole village was more important than her individual profits, and as the "Squire's lady" was a liberal customer, she was on her side, and was foremost in shaking her head at the Squire. As those who were in her debt never ventured to differ from her, the Squire had soon a goodly number of old women for his enemies.

But he was not without some partisans. Ford, the blacksmith and village oracle, had all the shoeing of the Overton stables. Keeley the coachman, was no gossip, but a nod of the head from him was as good

as a word, and Ford was not the man to throw away Keeley's custom. So when the oracle heard all that was to be said in praise of the Squire's lady and in disparagement of the Squire, he only shook his head, and said oracularly, "We'll wait and see; there's more nor you and me knows on."

The odd little mistakes of the Squire's wife in her dispensation of charity were not overlooked. The putting of John Tucker into broadcloth was only one of many little things which shewed ignorance on her part, and was even more noticed by the lower classes than the upper.

The agricultural folk were accustomed to wear the smock, and the wives were emulous of showing how much artistic needlework could be put into these garments. Some were white, and some were drab, and some dark green. The

green, when they had stood the weather, were particularly picturesque, and it was in a weather-worn green smock that John Tucker had been painted by young Arnold the artist. Those who wore the garment were as proud of a good smock as any man might be of a good coat.

“Have you seen Johnny Tucker in his new togs?” said Ford to everyone who came to gossip during the week after that Sunday when the old man appeared in broadcloth. “He’s a sight to see, he is. She’s a-going to put me into swallow-tails next.”

Such was Ford’s opinion on the subject, and he ruled the men at Overton. So that in time two parties arose in the village; one, consisting chiefly of women, who were led by Miss Green and Miss Royds, and were of opinion that the “poor dear Squire’s lady was badly used;” and

another, composed principally of men, with the oracle as their leader, who declared that the "Squire had a nasty time of it."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ludicrous incident of Johnny Tucker's change from smock to broadcloth was productive of rather serious results. After the lecture from the parson the Squire plucked up a little courage to remonstrate with his wife on her indiscriminate charity. It was pointed out to her (with the help of Parson Broderick, at the dinner table), that there were various ways of helping the poor without pauperizing them by gifts. Mrs. Thornton Meadows, who always appeared to give all deference to the parson's opinions, asked

in what way she could best give assistance in the parish. Broderick suggested that there were ways of helping the poor to help themselves, and that except in times of illness or unusual distress, he thought money or gifts should not be bestowed. Mrs. Meadows thanked him in the most grateful manner for his advice, and said she would for the future consult him before dispensing charity.

It happened some week or two after this that the family of a labourer named Gossett, who lived at the further end of the village, were down with fever. The father and two of the children had it. Mrs. Meadows, who, since her husband's reproof, had been anxious to shew her zeal in the cause of charity, personally visited the sufferers.

Before long she was attacked by the disease and confined to her room.

Thornton was now in a more miserable state than ever. He knew in his own heart that he wished his wife might die ; and yet his conscience pricked him in the matter. It seemed to him so selfish to wish for the death of a fellow-creature who interfered with his enjoyment of life. It is recorded that Charles the Second visited his unloved queen, Catherine of Bragança, when she was sick unto death, and implored her to live for his sake ; and the ill-used wife took him at his word.

Thornton Meadows probably had, at one moment, some such tender feeling, for when he heard his wife was very seriously ill, he paid her a visit, prepared to utter a few kind words. But by the time he reached her bedside the poor fever-stricken creature had become delirious.

“Don’t you know me?” he said.

“Yes,” she cried, her eyes, which had always so soft a look, seeming now to start from their sockets; “I know you—it’s Olivia you like, I tell you it’s Olivia—didn’t I say her name was Olivia—isn’t it on the cross there—there—” pointing with her finger to the corner of the room; “it’s the right date, I tell you—fourteenth of—of—” She sank back exhausted.

“You’d better leave her, Sir,” said the nurse; “it excites her, and the doctor said she must on no account be excited.”

The Squire left the room, and sought his little stepdaughter.

“Pet !” he said ; “ did you ever mention to your mother what I told you about the cross in the church-yard ?”

“No, papa, never.”

"Are you quite sure? Think, child! Haven't you said something about that pretty lady named Olivia that I told you was like you?"

"No, papa, I never said anything about it at all, except to Cousin Bart one day when we were in the church-yard. I asked him if he'd ever seen Olivia."

"How could she have known it?" said Thornton, muttering to himself.

Mrs. Meadows reached that stage of the fever when the patient either succumbs or lies for many days in an unconscious state, without change either for better or worse. What anxious days those are for loving relations and anxious friends—for a husband, or wife, or father, or mother, or anyone who clings to the soul that is threatening to leave the poor fever-stricken body!

But the Squire's wife, who lay in a

luxuriously appointed room, with every comfort that human ingenuity could devise, had no loving heart to tremble for the life that was hanging on a thread.

Her husband made dutiful calls at the door at periodical times, and Miss Sophia Green, with her lynx-like eyes and slimy manner, called every day to hear the last account of her "dear friend." For several days the answer "no change" was given.

Thornton Meadows sought his cousin's society more than ever during this time. It was in the early autumn, when the nights began to get chilly, and the two friends used to sit up half the night in the parson's bedroom by the fire, smoking and talking. The parson had as much as he could do to attend to his duties by day, and sit up with the Squire at night.

"Don't you think, Thorn," said the parson one Saturday night, "that I ought to pray for her in church to-morrow?"

The Squire puffed away at his cigar and did not answer.

"It would be the proper thing, you know, Thorn."

"Would it?"

"Yes, it should be done; but, of course, it must be as you wish. You are the person interested in her. She does not seem to have any relations, or anyone to care for her. It is our duty, Thorn, to wish the best for her, however much we may have disliked her."

"Yes," said Thorn, staring vacantly at the fire, as if he scarcely noticed what was said.

"I quite understand what you feel," said the parson; "and God knows I am but a weak creature myself, and

not fit to judge other men, or teach them. But, Thorn, that poor soul, whatever her sins may be, is lying there without a friend in the world, for you can scarcely call the new acquaintances she has made in the neighbourhood her friends. It is nothing to them whether she live or die. Ought we not to pray for her restoration? Perhaps, if she recover, this illness may bring about a change in her."

"I cannot wish her to live," said Thorn, tossing his cigar in the fender, and covering his face with his hands.

"But you must pray to God that she may live, Thorn, and that you may learn to love her. We must not expect everything to be arranged for our ease and pleasure in life. This is the cross you have to bear, and you must not only bear it, but thank God for sending it. And at this moment, when the life

that has brought you so much trouble seems to be passing away, you must ask God to preserve it. That is what any Christian man or woman ought to do, and you know you're a Christian at heart and soul, Thorn, though you deny it."

The Squire sat still with his face covered. He had no spirit to bring his philosophy to bear against the simple earnestness of the parson. His cousin's Christianity, perhaps, had no particular effect on him in changing his opinions; but the parson himself had a very great influence over him.

The next day the prayers of the church were offered up for "Isabella Meadows, who is sorely stricken with fever." The Squire occupied his own pew with his little stepdaughter, to the astonishment of the villagers; and, as her mother's name was mentioned the

child looked up curiously in her step-father's face as though she thought that she and "papa," and "Cousin Bart," would much rather her mother did not recover. Children find it so difficult to disguise the truth.

CHAPTER XV.

THE burden was not to be lifted from the Squire's shoulders. His wife recovered, and the old life began again. The change that Parson Broderick had looked for did not come. Everything went on as before, except that the Squire seemed to bear his trouble more quietly and gravely. The illness had made a break which gave him time to collect himself as it were. He now seriously set himself the task of making the best of a broken life.

He parcelled out his time for every

day in the week, and allowed himself none of those delicious idle moments which he had once known how to enjoy better than most men. Three hours every morning were given to the education of his little stepdaughter.

There were also times—happy times—when he and Pet and Laddie took outdoor exercise. There were little excursions for botanising and sketching, in which Laddie of course took part.

There was the visit to the stable every morning, for Pet was fond of animals, and was on intimate terms with all the horses; and had now begun to learn riding. There was the chat with Keeley, to which Pet and her father looked forward as much as the coachman himself, and Pet was also a great favourite with Mrs. Keeley at the lodge.

Then there were the visits to the

parson's parlour in winter, and the summer-house in summer—visits made on the very smallest excuse, or with no excuse at all. All these things were the Squire's chief pleasures.

On four afternoons in the week the parson came up to the Hall and sat with his pupil a couple of hours. His teachings commenced with the reading of a chapter in the New Testament, in which pupil and master read a verse alternately, and which in time came to be read in Greek.

On these afternoons Parson Broderick generally remained to dinner, a fact soon discovered by Miss Green, who used to choose those days for driving out with Mrs. Meadows, and staying to dine in a friendly way afterwards.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays, being half holidays, Pet always dutifully asked

her mother whether she required her to drive out with her; and unless it interfered with some scheme of Mrs. Meadows's, the answer was usually in the affirmative. So these half-holidays were black days indeed to the child, who much preferred her Greek and Latin lessons with Cousin Bart.

“I wonder whether she'll want me?” was her thought all Wednesday and Saturday mornings.

One of the parson's unmarried sisters, a lively young lady of about five-and-twenty, came to stay sometimes at the Vicarage now. Miss Green at once conceived a most gushing affection for her; but Fanny Broderick by no means returned it.

Old Keziah rather resented this introduction of any female element into the Vicarage, for she regarded her

beloved master as her own property, and so far as household matters were concerned, did not want any interference.

Miss Fanny was inclined at first to take rather a high hand with the old housekeeper, but the parson managed to set things straight between them.

Moreover, they soon found a common bond of sympathy, which gave Keziah many opportunities of showing her eloquence and quoting her stock of texts; for they both agreed that if ever there was an angel on earth it was the parson; that Miss Green was a hateful creature, and trying to catch him; and that the poor Squire had made a dreadful mistake in marrying his aunt's waiting-woman, for a waiting-woman Keziah maintained she was.

The marriage had caused great grief in the Lincolnshire Rectory; for, although the Squire had seen but little of his relations, and was better known to them by his thoughtful gifts than his presence, they had become familiarized with all his ways and doings through the parson's letters.

"Thorn" had been for many years a household name with them.

Thornton Meadows was only too glad to welcome his Cousin Fanny, as some one who could sit at his dinner-table and help to make the meal a cheerful one. This may seem very sensual at first sight.

There are thousands of people who care very little for what they eat and drink; there are other thousands who would let nothing interfere with their eating and drinking. But there are sensitive, nervous people, who not only

care for what they eat and drink, but who get no benefit from their food when they are surrounded by untoward circumstances.

One would think that King Solomon, with his plurality of wives, need never have sat down to feed with a hated person; and yet the author of the proverb must have written feelingly when he said that, "better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

Bob Keeley, the coachman, was right when he thought his master would rather be sitting down in the lodge to pork and onions than at his own dining-table with his wife.

That sitting down to meals day after day with a hated person is, amongst the sensitive ones, a surer cause of indigestion than anything else. At breakfast and luncheon Thornton had the

company of his little step-daughter to cheer him, but at dinner he sometimes, though very rarely, had to sit alone with his wife. He could generally count on Broderick for four evenings in the week, and on Sundays also; and lynx-eyed Miss Green was even preferable to no one at all.

Miss Arabella Meadows had quite declined to visit Overton Hall since the wedding, though her some time companion had written her a very pretty letter and invited her to do so. Thornton's sisters had also refused to recognize his wife; but neither of these matters troubled the Squire much.

He welcomed his Cousin Fanny, and begged her to come and stay at the Hall for a lengthened period, but the sprightly young lady felt she could not do so unless Mrs. Meadows seconded

the invitation, and this she would not do.

There had been one little incident in Mrs. Meadows's illness which had raised just a spark of hope in Thornton's mind. He imagined that she must have learnt in some way of his romantic fancy for the young Olivia Arnold, and that perhaps she was jealous. It is said that jealousy cannot exist without love; but experience has often proved otherwise. Jealousy is too often a dog-in-the-manger feeling of not letting others have what you cannot get or make use of yourself. But even a little jealousy would have proved to Thornton Meadows that his wife was at least human.

In the early days of her recovery, when he paid her some slight attentions, he persuaded her to walk with him through the grounds and across the

churchyard to the Vicarage. As they passed by the little marble cross the Squire said :

“Did I ever tell you the history of that little cross ?”

“No,” she said, as innocently as if she had never noticed it before.

“Have you ever read the inscription on it ?”

“No,” she said, stopping to look at it, and reading aloud. “There is but little of it ; what makes you ask ?”

“It was so curious that in your illness you talked of that cross and the inscription.”

“Did I ? I must have read it mechanically at some time or other, and I suppose it remained impressed on my mind. How very curious !”

“Then you know nothing of the poor girl who was buried there ?”

"No, I never heard the name before. What was her history?"

Thornton told all he knew, and how he had himself caused the marble cross to be placed there, and had it kept in order.

"How very kind of you!" said his wife. "And you say the poor man has never been down for many years now?"

"No: I daresay he's dead, or married again. I don't suppose he'll ever turn up, so I must keep the little grave in order."

"Did you hear what became of the child?"

"No, I never inquired, for I didn't know the man, and it never occurred to me that the poor little wretch would live. I suppose few children left in that way survive."

“Poor man ! I daresay he consoled himself with another wife. Men never nurse their grief very long.”

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN we look forward to any great trouble we are apt to fancy we shall never be able to bear it, that it will probably kill us.

When Thornton Meadows had been married five months, he never thought he should live for five years with his wife; and yet five years passed away and found the Squire still facing his trouble and making the best of it. Not that he felt it any the less. There were certain reasons which caused him to feel it more than ever. But on the other hand there was perhaps also more

compensation, as we shall in time discover.

These five years had not been particularly eventful in Overton village; in fact, such was the state of stagnation that Miss Green was pining for a little dish of scandal, for affairs at the Hall had long since ceased to be of any interest, though Mrs. Meadows and Miss Green were still intimate friends to all outward appearance.

Captain Dallas had given just a fillip to things a year before, or rather his wife had, by dying; upon which occasion Miss Sophia Green informed everybody confidently that the poor dear soul had been greatly neglected by her husband, who was too much taken up with whiskey-drinking and smoking to pay any attention to his wife in her illness. But this zeal for Mrs. Dallas was prematurely stopped by an ugly-looking blue letter

from a firm of solicitors in London, who informed that, had they not sent an abject apology was sent through them to Captain Dallas, an action for libel would be commenced. There had also been some slight skirmishes between Miss Fanny Broderick and Miss Sophia Green, and the latter had insinuated that the former was flirting with her cousin, Mr. Thornton Meadows, when his wife's back was turned.

Fanny, who had a romantic attachment to a Lincolnshire curate who had next to nothing a year, was highly indignant. She scribbled off page after page on the subject to her "dearest Charlie," lest he should get to hear of it in any other way, and explained everything that could have given rise to such an accusation. She was, as her brother Bart said, "hopelessly engaged" to this young gentleman, for there seemed

no chance of his getting any preferment.

She told him how she felt bound to take Thorn's part against Miss Green and Mrs. Meadows, who were always plotting to annoy him. She gave a long history of Miss Green and all the mischief she created, which she learnt from Keziah. But she could not tell of one circumstance which we happen to know, namely, that Miss Green and Mrs. Meadows had entered into a compact to "make the place too hot to hold Fanny Broderick."

The Squire's wife hated her because the Squire liked her; and Miss Green found her in the way because she came between the parson and herself. Moreover she was a formidable rival in matters relating to the church and village. She could play the organ a very great deal better than Miss Green. She had learnt

in the Lincolnshire home how to manage village clubs and meetings, and suggested various improvements to her brother, which he scarcely dared to carry out without consulting Miss Green. Then, last and greatest crime of all, she was young and handsome, and youth and beauty, as I have before remarked, were things that Sophia Green could not put up with in a woman.

So she had, with the help of Mrs. Meadows, literally made the place too hot for Fanny Broderick; and Fanny preferred to remain at home.

This was a very pleasant play for Miss Green while it lasted, but Fanny had been driven out of the field some two years before, and there was an end to the excitement.

An older sister of Bart's had since spent a few months with him, but she had not the spirit of Fanny, and decided

that it was best not to interfere between husband and wife.

Kemington, the farmer, had become a great man, especially since the Prince of Wales had condescended to take refreshment at the farm one day when he was out hunting; and Miss Green kept a careful account of the various additions to and changes in the farmer's establishment, how he kept another hunter, or another servant, or had set up a pony-carriage for his wife, who ought to be attending to the dairy instead of driving about; and how his daughters were going to an expensive school, and how he had positively taken to give six o'clock dinner parties, an unheard of thing amongst the Oakshire farmers. Of course Miss Green prophesied the farmer's ruin.

Both the Miss Bonsors were married, so they were no longer food for scandal

to the lynx-eyed lady. There was one little episode which promised to be quite a delicate morsel, but Miss Green came out of that so ingloriously that she did not like ever to be reminded of it.

A labourer named Hearn had lost his wife, and was left with three small children. Both the man and his wife were labourers of the lowest sort, the woman working out in the fields with her baby tied behind her or lying on the ground by her side. Shortly after her death a rough young woman named Betsy Barton took up her abode with Hearn, minded the children, and occasionally worked in the fields.

Miss Green was horrified. She made a point of calling on Mr. Broderick "on very particular business" as she told Keziah. She related the circumstances to the parson, and trying to get up a

blush, and appearing to be very reluctant to speak out, she managed to hint that Hearn and the woman were living in breach of the seventh commandment; that they were such rough, low people that they probably were not aware of the serious crime they were committing, and that it was the parson's duty to put them in the right way by persuading them to marry.

Mr. Broderick suggested that perhaps Miss Green could do more good by speaking to the woman herself, and that he would be quite ready to marry the couple if they agreed.

Miss Green found the man and woman together in the cottage or hut, for it could scarcely be called a house, and rated them both roundly for their mode of life. They simply sat with open eyes and mouths, not understanding half that was said; but having a vague notion

that something might be gained by doing whatever Miss Green bade them; they nodded affirmatively when they were asked if the banns should be put up. Accordingly the banns were published on the following Sunday. Immediately there ensued a great scandal in the village, for Miss Royds, the village shopwoman, informed all her customers that Betsy Barton was Hearn's stepdaughter. The parson hearing of this called on Hearn, and asked what they meant by putting up the banns.

"We did it to please she, said Hearn.
"Her wouldn't go till us promised."

Since this little episode Miss Green had really had no excitement, except an occasional skirmish with Johnny Tucker. Mrs. Tucker had at last succumbed to her mysterious malady; and Johnny who had been accustomed to count his old woman as worth so much a week to

him on account of the food and gifts sent to her, was discontented now that the supplies were stopped.

While Miss Green brought good things or caused them to be sent Johnny put up with her lectures; but he was not going to listen when he could make nothing by it. And this he very plainly showed by going into his cottage and locking the door whenever he saw his tormentor coming up the lane.

Captain Dallas had left Overton soon after his wife's death, and The Cottage had remained unoccupied, so that even here Miss Green's resources were cut off. But Fortune was soon about to favour her.

The Squire had, as I have said, been married five years, correctly speaking it should be four years and eleven months, for I am about to record the events

that happened on his stepdaughter's fourteenth birthday.

But first a word as to the young lady herself. Five years had made a very great difference in her appearance. She was always tall for her age, but she now looked really like a woman; so much so that the girl herself had quite refused to wear "short frocks" any longer, though her mother had tried hard to make her do so.

She was a tall, thoughtful-looking girl, too thoughtful almost. This was attributed by her father to the troubles she had borne with him, for there was a perfect sympathy between the two; and she entered into all her stepfather's joys and sorrows as completely as if she were his own daughter—perhaps more so. But the village folk were of opinion, through their oracle Ford, that Miss Meadows was being that crammed with

learning by the Squire and the parson that they wouldn't be surprised if she was took off in a galloping consumption.

Thornton declared she grew more and more like his ideal Olivia, but Bart Broderick said that must be all fancy, and that it was because he always had Olivia in his mind.

She had certainly been strangely brought up. Since her stepfather had taken her in hand her mother had not interfered much with her, and even less than ever of late years. The Squire and the parson had not only been her teachers but her companions.

There were a few children of about her own age amongst the families in the neighbourhood whom she saw occasionally, and Fanny Broderick had associated with her a great deal when on her visits to her brother; and with Fanny she kept up a correspondence. But her

greatest friend and companion was her stepfather. She had thus learned to look at things generally more from a man's point of view than a woman's.

By this perhaps she lost something, but she probably gained a great deal more. She had perhaps become womanly before her time by reason of her father's trouble. With this trouble always between them they had learnt to smooth down all the small difficulties of life. The child had never been tiresome with her lessons or petulant or wilful, because she felt there was always that great black cloud near them, and therefore they must catch all the sunshine they could.

Her beautiful blue eyes were never filled with tears except for her mother. To her father she was a most obedient and loving daughter and pupil; to her mother she tried to be dutiful; but one terrible weight was always on her mind,

she hated her mother, hated her more and more, and she felt that it was wicked. She did not tell her father of this burden, she thought that he had enough to bear. But the older she grew the more she felt it, and her mother's presence was becoming unbearable to her. This may have helped to make her face so pale and thoughtful. Hatred is an unwholesome thing to carry about with one.

CHAPTER XVII.

MISS MEADOWS'S birthday was to be signalized by three things. First, she was to have a whole holiday; next she and her stepfather were to lunch at the Vicarage, and then in the evening Cousin Bart was to come to dinner. But perhaps the most enjoyable part of all was that the holiday was to be spent in real idleness, in lounging about and staring at all the pleasant things, as Thorn expressed it. He had kept so well to his resolution of never having a leisure moment, that it would be

quite a treat to indulge in a little idleness.

The middle of July can if it chooses be a very enjoyable time of year. The Squire and his daughter and the faithful Laddie went across to the stables directly after breakfast, for that was a part of the day's routine that they did not mean to forego.

Laddie was a grave middle-aged dog by this time; but he was still ready for fun, and he knew that this was a gala day when they were all going to do nothing but enjoy themselves; for his young mistress had informed him of it, and he quite understood her doggie language. Moreover Pet had gathered a bunch of Provence roses, and arranged them with some lime blossom in her broad-brimmed straw-hat; also she had pinned a rose at her bosom, and some lime blossom in her

stepfather's coat; and Laddie knew that was no ordinary weekday proceeding. The smell of the lime blossoms pervaded the air, and myriads of bees were seeking honey from the fragrant flowers with a hum of contentment at the plenty to be found.

"Oh, isn't this nice, papa," said Pet as they walked across the gardens to the stables. "Fancy a whole day and nothing to do—nothing for you I mean; for I get plenty of half holidays that I don't like. She can't expect me to ask about the drive to-day, can she? because it's Friday, and that's not one of her days."

"No, Pet. Besides I require you to-day."

"Of course you do, papa. I'm going to be a very important person to-day; I'm going to amuse my clever father. Fancy that, Laddie! Down, boy!"

This was so particularly pleasing a prospect to Laddie that he jumped up at his young mistress and imprinted some autographs on her clean cotton gown.

“Do you remember when I first brought you across to the stables, Pet?”

“Yes, I remember so well. Aunt Arabella had vexed you at breakfast, and you called me and Laddie to come out with you, and that was when you told me you didn’t like my name. What a long time ago it seems! ages! I remember so well too you told Cousin Bart that mamma would soon leave, and I was so unhappy. I loved you so much even then, because I had never loved anyone before except some of the girls at school.”

“Yes, child, I saw that, and I was so pleased with you that I wanted to have

you altogether. And that morning decided me, I think. I paid very dearly for you, Pet."

"Yes, dear papa, I know you did, and I wish I could make it up. I often think that I brought you the trouble."

"Don't fret about it, little one, I wouldn't undo it if I could. You have made it up. But I suppose I shall have to lose you some day."

"No, no, never! I'll never leave you alone with mamma! I'll die for you, do anything for you, but I'll never leave you till you tell me to."

"Ah! so you think now, Pet! You're only fourteen to-day, you know, though, by Jove, anyone would think you were seventeen."

"Yes, I'm sure I must be more than fourteen. But mamma says I'm not."

“And in a few years we shall have some gay young cavalier coming after you and saying all sorts of pretty things that will turn your little head.”

“No, I’m quite sure, papa, that if ever I marry I shall still love you best, and I shall tell my husband that he must be content to be liked second best. I’m not even sure of second best, for I love Cousin Bart so much that I think my husband would have to come off third best, and perhaps he wouldn’t agree to that, do you think so, papa?”

She took his arm and locked her hands over it and looked up into his face.

“No, my dear, I expect he would wish me and Cousin Bart out of the way. But we must not stand in the way of your happiness when the time comes.”

"Now, papa, this is a holiday, and we're not going to talk of anything so dreadful as the time coming for me to go away from you, because I don't mean to go till you turn me out. Even mamma should never make me go if you said I was to stay. She might threaten anything she liked, but I wouldn't go."

"Well, you know my wishes on the subject."

"Yes, dear papa."

They were opening the gate that led into the stable-yard, and Laddie bounded through to greet his friends the horses.

"Good morning, Keeley! It's my birthday, and I've got a whole holiday, so we needn't be in such a hurry this morning."

"Wish you many happy returns of the day, miss! I'm sure a holiday will

do you good, miss, for you want some o' them roses in your cheeks. Squire gives you too much book-learning. Want the horses at the usual time, miss?"

The Squire and his daughter rode regularly when weather permitted, and on half-holidays, when Mrs. Meadows did not require her daughter's company, a longer ride than usual was taken.

"Oh, no, we can ride on any day, but this is a real holiday, Keeley, when we're going to stare about us and do positively nothing. We're going to have a gossip with Mrs. Keeley, if she's not very busy, is she?"

"No, miss, Friday's mending day, an' she can talk and work too as she says; and there's plenty to do with seven of us in family, and me a reg'lar tearcoat, as Liz says."

The lodge was next visited, where

Mrs. Keeley was found in the best room, because it was cool, she said, with a huge basket of linen and hosiery on the table.

The coachman's wife curtsied when she saw the Squire, and apologised for her basket of clothes; but the Squire begged her not to remove them, for, he said, a basket of clean linen was a comfortable sight. There was a pile of stockings and little socks already mended, and Miss Meadows admired Mrs. Keeley's needlework, and said she thought she must come and take a few lessons from her. Then she asked individually after all the five little ones, and produced something from her pocket specially for them in honour of her birthday.

After chatting with her for some time, they went over to the Vicarage, and found Cousin Bart writing his

sermon in the summer-house. They teased and chaffed him till, as he said, his sermon had clean gone out of his head.

“Never mind, old boy,” said Thorn. “I’ll write it for you if you like. And mind you have lunch in good time, because we shall both be dreadfully hungry, after doing nothing all the morning.”

Then they went across a bit of copse to reach the village in a circuitous way, for anything was pleasanter than the road. The Squire had promised to show his stepdaughter the Cottage; for she had never seen it. One of the gardeners had been ordered to go over with the keys and open the place, and clear up the garden a bit.

“What a sweet little place!” said Pet, as she went in at the door in the wall and looked round. “Oh, I wouldn’t mind living here a bit, it’s so quiet and nice,

and shut in. I wonder somebody doesn't take it!"

"The terms are so unusual, and it isn't everybody that cares to be shut in. And the furniture is not cheerful-looking. I don't care to change it now. It belongs to your mother."

"Does it?"

"Yes, for her life. If I die perhaps she would come and live here; or perhaps she would not care to."

"Oh, how dreadful! I should have to live here with her. I shall never take an interest in it again."

"Don't be afraid, child. I've taken care of you, and left you in Cousin Bart's hands, if I die."

"But you're not going to die!" said Pet, looking distressed.

"Not yet, for your sake, I hope. Come and look at the rooms."

They went through the rooms, which

certainly were not cheerfully furnished; and they had that dreary look which a want of occupancy gives. There were no signs of life anywhere.

Then they wandered over the garden, and picked the raspberries, and talked of what they would do if they had to live in a small place like that, and planned what the garden might be, and how a bow-window might be thrown out here in the house, and a verandah built there, and an extra room in another place. As they turned one of the corners they suddenly came across a gentleman, who seemed startled when he encountered them, but presently recovering himself raised his hat and said :

“Pardon me! I don’t know whether I’m trespassing, but seeing by the board outside that the place was to let, and finding the gate open, I thought

perhaps I was at liberty to walk in."

"The house is generally seen by appointment only with the agents, but my daughter and I happen to be here to-day, and I shall have great pleasure in showing you over myself."

"You are very kind," said the stranger, bowing, "I shall appreciate the honour."

They went into the house again followed by the stranger. He was a handsome man—or rather ought to have been handsome, but for his weather-beaten appearance—with dark brown hair and dark whiskers and beard and moustache, all streaked with grey. His face seemed almost covered with hair, and his dark blue eyes were set deep under thick eyebrows. He might have been any age from thirty-five to fifty. He was carelessly dressed and altogether rough in appearance, but his manner

was that of a polished gentleman.

Pet was particularly interested in him, but every time she tried to have a good look at him she found him scrutinizing her very closely.

“It’s really too kind of you,” said the stranger, when they had been through the house. “I came in out of mere idle curiosity, for although I’m seeking a house, I had no intention of settling down in this part of the country; but really I think I might be very happy here. It is certainly an objection as you say that only a yearly tenant can be taken; one does not care to be turned out in a year, just when one has settled down and become comfortable.”

“No,” said the Squire, laughing, “I should not like it myself. But I don’t see why my wife shouldn’t be able to guarantee possession for at least three

years. I imagine the lawyers could make it right if she agrees."

The stranger turned towards Miss Meadows.

"Have I the honour of seeing the lady before me?"

"Oh, no!" said the Squire, laughing, "this is my daughter, as I mentioned before, I think—"

"Your daughter?"

"Yes, she's only a little girl, at least she's big enough; but she's fourteen to-day."

"Dear me! I beg your pardon, young lady, I took you to be older. I hope I have not offended you."

"Oh, no!" she laughed. "I'm quite proud of looking so old."

"If you will take up this card to Overton Hall," said the Squire, handing a card on which he had pencilled a few words, "I think it is very likely

you will find my wife, and you might get over the first difficulty; for without her consent nothing can be done. Then if you will communicate with the agents they will arrange everything with my lawyer. I would advise you to go at once to the Hall, as you are certain to find Mrs. Meadows in before lunch."

"A thousand thanks for your courtesy," said the stranger.

"Pray don't mention it," said the Squire. "I'm glad to be of service to anyone." They exchanged bows, and the stranger left.

"What an interesting man!" said Pet. "I didn't know at first whether to call him ugly or handsome, but I think he is downright handsome, don't you, papa?"

"Yes, he must be a curious sort of fellow. He's seen rough times somewhere. Perhaps he's a sailor."

"But he isn't a bit like Captain Dallas, papa."

"No, quite a different sort. I wonder whether he'll take the place. I hope he will. I like the look of the man. I wonder who he is? At any rate, if he does, you and I have done a stroke of business for your mother, haven't we, Pet? She ought to thank us. While the place is empty it is a loss of so much pin-money to her. I should think she'd be only too glad to let it for a longer term; there can be no difficulty except in case of her death, and that is not likely to happen. I think now, Pet, by the time we've walked home through the copse, Cousin Bart will be ready for us."

Meanwhile Keziah was spreading a lunch that was to do honour to the Vicarage, for although the Squire and his daughter were frequent visitors, they

seldom took a meal there now. The parson went in to see that everything was arranged to his satisfaction, and Keziah stood regarding the table with a look of triumph. There were jellies and creams, and all sorts of good things of her own making.

“There, Sir, it’s fit for the Queen, though I say it, as shouldn’t.”

“Yes, it looks very nice, Keziah. Your cookery is excellent. I never get better. I’m sure it’ll be appreciated, for the Squire said they should come in very hungry after doing nothing.”

“Ah, bless his heart, he have need of a good meal sometimes, as it must be unked to sit down with that—”

“Now, Keziah, I will have you speak respectfully of Mrs. Meadows. Remember her position.”

“Yes, Sir, as we’re told in the blessed Scriptures—”

"That's enough, Keziah!"

"But the Lord himself, Sir, couldn't make no lady of her, though she do go to church reg'lar. The poor dear Squire he's that altered that his own mother wouldn't know him. I'm sure I remember when you two was more like merry lads, a-laughing and a—"

"Well, Keziah," said the parson, laughing in spite of himself, "we are getting middle-aged men now, and are not likely to be so merry as we used to be."

"Middle-aged! bless your 'art, Sir, as you're still young enough, and 'andsome enough, as I hope you won't mind an old woman telling you so, and it ain't natural-like for the Squire to be a-settlin' down like an old gentleman with a grown-up daughter. How old did you say young miss was to-day, Sir?"

"Fourteen, Keziah."

"Deary me! only fourteen, and quite

a grown-up young lady. And a sweet young lady too, Sir, ain't she, as ever you'd wish to see, only she come of bad stock, and what's in the blood can't——"

"Hush! Keziah! You must not have such notions, I call it quite wicked of you."

"Well, Sir, as you says of a Sunday, the sins o' the fathers, which in course it means the sins o' the mothers as well——"

"And pray what sins has Mrs. Meadows committed that you are to judge her?"

"Well, Sir, she's pretty well kilt our Squire to judge by his looks, and you know she was only waiting-woman to——"

"Keziah, once for all I will not have you mention that again. Mrs. Meadows held a very honourable position, and it

was nothing for her to be ashamed of."

"Of course you know best, Sir, and you wouldn't love her nor more than I do, 'cept that the Lord gives you more Christian grace nor He gives to any of us, so as you loves even your enemies."

"We must all try to love our enemies, Keziah."

"So the Lord tells us in the bleseed Scriptures, but He was expectin' a sight more of us nor ever we could do, as He must 'a known when he said it."

"Here they are, Keziah, coming through the wicket."

The parson went out to meet his guests, and brought them into the snug little dining-room, and soon the happy little party were seated, and doing justice to Keziah's good things.

"We've just had quite a little adven-

ture, Bart," said the Squire. "As we were looking over the cottage a stranger came in, a very interesting stranger, in fact Pet fell in love with him; and we acted the house-agent, and pointed out the beauties of the place."

"I can't say you did much to recommend it, papa, for you kept pointing out its defects."

"But I think the stranger was too much taken up with you, Pet, to notice any defects. Your presence made it beautiful, eh?"

"What nonsense, papa! Why, what do you think, Cousin Bart? He actually mistook me for papa's wife! Wasn't it fun? I felt so important."

"And did this interesting stranger seem inclined to take the place?"

"Well, he said he came out of idle curiosity, but Pet's eyes had such an effect on him that I believe he's going

to take it for the chance of looking at her occasionally."

"How ridiculous of you, papa! He's quite an old gentleman."

"Old indeed, Miss Juvenile! He's not much older than I am, and you're not going to be disrespectful enough to call your father an old man, are you?"

"But he's older than you, papa."

"Not so very much, I suspect. He's more knocked about than aged, I should say."

"And you think he's really going to take the cottage, Thorn?" asked the parson.

"Well, the only thing he objected to was the not having it secured to him for a certain number of years. I don't see why he shouldn't if my wife agrees, and my heir-at-law agrees, so I sent him up to the hall to ask Mrs. Meadows about it at once."

“She’ll hardly thank you, Thorn, for sending a stranger to see her on business matters. Ladies don’t like business.”

“I don’t think my wife minds business when it concerns money. She was not over-pleased at the Cottage being untenanted so long. I should think she’ll thank us, don’t you, Pet?”

“Yes, and I should think the stranger would be much more fascinated with her than with me, papa. Strangers always are, you know.”

“That will depend on his taste, my dear.”

“But you see, Pet,” said the parson, “your mother’s married, and you are not, and the interesting stranger may prefer a single lady.”

“Yes,” said the Squire, laughing, “he was evidently anxious to make quite sure what the relation between us was,

so as to see what his chances were."

"How you do teaze me, papa! I declare I'll go into short frocks again if you make such fun of me."

"And really," said the parson with mock gravity, "I think it is time I retired from my post of tutor, when my pupil is mistaken for a married lady."

"Now, Cousin Bart, if you begin to chaff me, I shall punish you. You know things are turned round to-day; you're the children and I'm the mistress, and I shall be very severe if you don't behave yourselves."

"But only see what a fine chance of revenge we should have to-morrow, when things turn back again," said the Squire, laughing.

The afternoon was passed merrily enough in the parson's garden. The Squire suggested a smoke in the summer-house, as it was a particular

occasion; and Pet lounged in the shade near, in a wicker chair; and Laddie lay on the cool grass at her feet and went to sleep with half an eye open, after having been fed right royally on some remains of the feast by Keziah.

“This has been a lovely birthday,” said Pet as they walked over to the hall some little time before dinner, leaving the parson to dress and come after; “but I shall not enjoy the rest of it so much.”

She little thought what the rest would bring forth.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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